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“MY OWN CHILD.”

7

"MY OWN CHILD."

A Novel.

BY
FLORENCE MARRYAT,

AUTHOR OF
"LOVE'S CONFLICT," "FIGHTING THE AIR," "VÉRONIQUE,"
ETC. ETC. ETC.

"There is, in all this cold and hollow world, no fount
Of deep, strong, deathless Love, save that within
A Mother's heart."

Hemans.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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TO
MY OWN CHILD,
ETHEL MAUDE ALPE,
AND TO HER HUSBAND,
EDMUND NICHOLAS ALPE,
I OFFER THIS FAINT REFLECTION
OF A
FEELING IMPRESSED ON MY HEART IN COLOURS
WHICH NEITHER
TIME NOR CIRCUMSTANCE WILL HAVE
THE POWER TO FADE.

“What is it? Ask the King of Kings,
Who hath decreed above,
That Change shall mark all earthly things
Except—a Mother’s Love.”

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MY OWN CHILD.

CHAPTER XIV.

MY CHILD'S AUNT.

I WAS sitting in my own room one afternoon in June, pondering over these things—indeed I had my Hugh's portrait in my hand at the moment—when a soft tap sounded on the panels of my door. I said "Come in," mechanically. Unless it had been Mrs. Raikes with the baby (and I had just left her fast asleep in the nursery), there was no one whom I cared to see. I do think I was as lonely at that period as it was possible for a girl to be.

At the sound of my voice the door was quickly opened; a lady, dressed in cloak and bonnet, stood upon the threshold.

I glanced at her and started to my feet.

Hugh's eyes—Hugh's hair—above all, Hugh's bright expression, were before me !

" Oh ! who are you ? " I cried in amazement.

" You don't know me," she answered, smiling. " I am Juliet—Mrs. Delancey. I have just arrived."

I knew she was expected, with Lord and Lady Claretown, and, with my usual shyness, had secreted myself upstairs, to avoid meeting them as long as possible ; but I felt no shyness now. Mrs. Delancey was holding out her arms to me, and I flew into them, and put up my face to hers, and clung to her as if she had been my mother. She was almost old enough to be.

" Oh ! " I exclaimed, " you are so like him—you *are* so like him ! "

" Am I, dear ? Most people thought we resembled each other ; but I did not think that you could see it."

"But look here," I said, as I exhibited the portrait. "There he is, just as he was to the last. And your eyes and hair are exactly the same."

Mrs. Delancey was visibly affected as she looked at her brother's picture.

"Poor, dear boy! Poor, darling boy!" she kept on repeating with quivering lips. "I did love him so, Katie. I loved him better than all the rest. And I think he loved me to!"

"I am sure he did," I responded eagerly, "he so often spoke of his sister Juliet to me. He always said you were his favourite. He used to call you the jolliest girl in the world."

"My poor Hugh! Oh, Katie! what a sad thing it was that he should die! And just as he was married, too. And you, my poor child! What a baby you look to have gone through so much trouble!"

"I am sixteen," I answered, sobbing.

"Sixteen ! Only two years older than my eldest boy. And you have a child of your own."

"Oh, yes ! such a darling ! Just like my Hugh," I said through my tears.

"How you must love her, Katie !"

"She is all I have to love. I have no father or mother, or brother or sister. I have no friends—nothing now but my baby."

"Don't say that, Katie. I will be your sister, or your mother, or anything you like to call me. Don't say you have no friends, child. Look on me as a friend, for I love you dearly for his sake."

"Oh ! why didn't you come before ?" I said, as we embraced each other fondly.

"I have been so miserable here."

"Miserable ! why, how is that ?"

"They won't let me have my baby," I said convulsively. "They have given her to Mrs. Raikes, and I never can see her or


nurse her except when she chooses ; and it is so lonely at night—and Jane has gone away from me—and—”

Mrs. Delancey looked very grave.

“Look here, dear,” she said kindly ; “we won’t discuss these points now, because I have only just arrived ; but we will have a long talk about them afterwards, and you must treat me just like a sister, and tell me everything. I wish I had been here before, Katie. But it was impossible ; I have only just returned from abroad. After the sad occurrences of last year I took my children away for change of air, and we came home last month.”

“I wish you had written to me,” I said regretfully.

“I wish I had, dear. It was a foolish sort of feeling that prevented me. I had heard so little of you, and that little led me to expect to find you so different from what you seem. And then I fancied you



were with your own friends, and did not care about making our acquaintance."

"Lady Power must have told you that," I remarked.

She did not answer me.

"Mrs. Delancey," I recommenced.

"Don't call me that, darling. Call me Juliet."

"Oh, how kind you are!" I said, as the once-familiar appellation broke on my ear. "No one has called me 'darling' since he died."

"My poor love!"

"I am only a girl, I know," I went on, with my face buried on her neck, "and I am awfully ignorant, and I used to be very wild; but I never thought, when I married Hugh, that I should do him any harm."

"I'm sure you didn't, dear," she said soothingly.

"I thought it would be such fun to run away and be married. And then I loved

him very much, you know—dearer than anything I have ever loved, except the baby. And he said it would be all right; but if I had known his people would be so angry about it—”

“They are not angry now, dear. It is all forgotten.”

“Oh! no, it isn’t. I can see it isn’t, and I remind them of it, and it makes me wretched. They love the baby because she belongs to Hugh, and she is to have all their money by-and-by. But they would like me to be dead and out of the way. And sometimes, Juliet, I feel as if I would like it too.”

“Katie, I can’t have you talk in this way. I assure you you are totally mistaken. My father and mother are not very demonstrative people, I know; and my sisters have lived so long by themselves that I think they have become rather selfishly inclined. Still, I am sure they are all

disposed to like you and to pity you. It was rather a disappointment at the time to all of us, you know, dear Katie," she went on softly, as she caressed my hanging hair; "and had dear Hugh lived I dare say there would have been a serious quarrel about his marriage with you, because there is no doubt it was very imprudent and ill-advised. But since God saw fit to take him, it is all over now, and there is nothing more to be said about it. And you must not fancy my parents cherish any resentment against you. They are not likely to do so, on the child's account, if not your own. They seem very proud of the child. By-the-way, do send for her. I long to see my new niece."

"We shall have to go up to the nursery, then," I answered, rising; "for Mrs. Raikes won't let baby come downstairs, except at stated hours."

"What! not when you send for her? I

never heard of such a thing. Why do you submit to it, Katie?"

"How can I help it? Lady Power says Raikes must not be interfered with."

"But you are the child's mother! You have surely a right to see her whenever you choose."

"I used to think so; but I don't like to make a fuss," I answered mournfully. "Oh, Juliet! I wish you would speak to Lady Power about it. You don't know how unhappy I have been without my baby. I want to have her always, as I did at Guildford—to talk to her about Hugh, so that the first thing she may remember learning is her father's name. I have called her after him," I added, in a more cheerful tone.

"So I have heard, dear. Well, let us make a pilgrimage to the nursery, now at all events, and I will see if I can get a few of these little disagreeables altered for you. You have not been open enough with my

mother, Katie. She would hardly worry you for nothing in this way."

"I know I am very silly," I whispered, as Mrs. Delancey wound her arm about my waist.

"I am sure you are very dear," she answered, as she stooped to kiss me.

The visit to the nursery was a great success. Mrs. Raikes, who had lived in my sister-in-law's family, drew in her horns directly she saw who was my companion, and could not find words enough in which to praise the mental and physical qualities of my baby. Mrs. Delancey acquiesced in her good opinion, but paid her no compliment on the subject whatever. All the admiration she bestowed on little May she addressed to me.

"She does you credit, Katie," she said, as she lifted my bouncing baby in her arms.

"Fancy her being only four months old !

Why, my youngest was not so big as this at six months—was she, Raikes?”

“I don’t think she was, madam, and she was a fine little lady, too. But this child is over-sized.”

“Just like her dear father. He was one of the finest young fellows I ever saw. She has his eyes, too, Katie!”

“I am so glad you see it,” I said excitedly; “for Lady Power says they will turn brown like mine. But I’m sure they are Hugh’s. So is her mouth, and the shape of her face! My bonnie child! Who should she be like, if not like him?”

And as little May chuckled in my face, I caught her from Juliet’s arms and covered her with kisses.

“It almost seems absurd to see you together, and think you are her mother. Mrs. Power looks ridiculously young to have a baby, doesn’t she, Raikes?”

“Oh! I’ve seen ladies look no older with

their first," replied Mrs. Raikes. "And so long as you have a good, experienced nurse, it don't much matter."

"But Mrs. Power had the entire charge of her child for the first three months—the most anxious time to look after a baby. I think it's wonderful she got on so well. Katie, I suppose she was the first child you had ever handled?"

"Quite the first," I said, laughing. "No one would ever trust me to nurse them before. But it's all very easy to do when you do it for your own child."

"You seem to have found it easy. However, I dare say you are very glad of Raikes' assistance now. She's an excellent *aide-de-camp* in the nursery, as I have reason to say, and takes wonderful care of her children. I don't think you ever close more than one eye at a time when you have an infant in bed with you, Raikes."

"I never spare myself trouble night nor



day to do' em justice, madam," replied Raikes, who was rather offended by the light tone of the conversation.

"I am sure you don't, and that Mrs. Power will acknowledge it as freely as I do. Baby is to be christened next week, I hear, Katie. What is the christening robe like?"

"I don't know! I haven't seen it," I replied vaguely.

"I can show it to you, madam," said Mrs. Raikes, as she opened a drawer in the wardrobe.

There it lay, in all its glory of Valenciennes lace and white satin, looking like the bridal dress of a fairy queen.

"Oh, how beautiful!" I exclaimed, involuntarily. "Baby, darling, you will look like a little princess, and poor mother won't know her child in all that finery."

"Why, it is dear Hugh's christening robe," said Mrs. Delancey, as she lifted part of the fabric in her hand.

All my gaiety vanished.

"Is it?" I said solemnly, as I knelt down and raised it to my lips. "Why didn't they tell me of it before? Why didn't they show it to me?"

"Her ladyship gave no orders that I was to show the robe to any one," remarked Mrs. Raikes.

"You might have guessed she would wish Mrs. Power to see it, since it belongs to her child," exclaimed my sister-in-law angrily.

"Her ladyship gave me no orders on the subject," repeated Mrs. Raikes.

"We must see all this altered," said Juliet, as she prepared to go; but I am not sure if Mrs. Raikes heard her. "Come, Katie dear! Leave your little beauty for a few minutes, and help me to lay aside my travelling things. And Lord and Lady Claretown are downstairs, too, waiting to be introduced to you. Good-bye, you sweet baby, for the present! We will have a

grand romp with you this evening. Come, dear Katie!" And without another look at the indignant Raikes, my dear new sister threw her arm round my figure, and drew me affectionately from the room.

CHAPTER XV.


‘HUGH MARY FRANCES GEORGINA.’

THE greater evils of my artificial life were modified after Mrs. Delancey's arrival at Gentian's Cross. She was so completely a practical woman of the world; she had been for so many years a wife and mother and B the responsible head of a large establishment, that her authority carried weight with it, and even Lady Power succumbed to her dictation. As for the servants, they were nowhere. The great Doran hardly ventured to make a remark in her presence; and butter would not have melted in the mouth of the majestic Mrs. Raikes whenever Juliet visited the nursery. The first good effects

of her influence made me foolishly happy. My baby was given back to me at night. It is true that the indignant nurse used to bring the sleeping bundle to me every evening, with a face as black as thunder, and, whilst she was unrolling my infant from innumerable flannels to place her by my side, give vent to invidious remarks concerning her own irresponsibility as to the child catching her "death of cold."

I heard them, but I did not care. My arms were trembling with eagerness to hold my baby again, and when I saw the downy little head nestled on my bosom I was blissfully content. Mrs. Raikes might bounce about the room, and rattle the milk-jug and the feeding-bottle, and slam the door, and do all in her power to wake up little May, and set her crying, that she might have an opportunity for proving that she had been right, and everybody else wrong; but I was too happy even to re-

monstrate with her behaviour. I folded my arms tight round my baby, and put my lips on her soft little crown, and felt that I had the world in my embrace. It was not an extravagant nor a dissipated pleasure, that of purring oneself to sleep with delight at the close contiguity of one's own child ; but Juliet, in procuring me this innocent and natural enjoyment, made me feel for the time being as though I had no wish left to be gratified. Long before the usual hour arrived for the solemn lighting of chamber candlesticks and interchange of good-nights, I used to steal away from the grand drawing-room to my own apartment, that I might have the delight of ringing my bell for Raikes to bring my treasure and lay her in my arms. And long after the household supposed that I was wrapped in sleep, would I lie, waking, but happy, listening with silent adoration to the peaceful breathing of my child. Then the



waking on those glorious summer mornings ! How sweet it was to be roused by my baby's note of warning ! Not a cry, nor a coo, but a little sound of impatience as though, waking first, she wondered greatly why my eyes were not also open. And I would start to find two large blue-grey orbs, like wood-violets steeped in dew, staring at me, half frightened, half expectant. But when, with consciousness, the love and the life came back to mine, and a smile with it, little May's face would change to joy, and she would laugh and coo whilst her fat, dimpled hands, pink like the heart of a rose, grabbed at my cambric frills and hanging hair. What fun we used to have in bed in the mornings, my baby and I ! What games of bo-beep behind the pillows—what tickling matches on toes and fingers—what long, long, loving kisses—what conversations about nothing at all, in language that nobody could understand. And then, silly

little girl that I was! and yet how often have I longed since that that sweet silly time were back again—I would draw my Hugh's picture from beneath my pillow, and open the case and hold it up before the baby's eyes, and try to teach her (at four months old, remember) to say "Hugh!"

I wonder how often I went through that farce, dividing my conversation between the sweet pictured face upon the cardboard and his innocent representative upon the pillow—the one, an unconscious infant; the other, a silent memory, each in its way so totally unable to respond to my warm, loving words, and yet the two that made up the sum total of my poor existence. To me it was the most natural idea to talk to both of them; but I fancy that, could any one have overheard me, the little comedy would have appeared almost as pathetic as it was absurd. But what can you expect of the combined efforts of sixteen years, and four months?

The one was almost as much a baby as the other !

The christening-day arrived. I cannot say that I had taken much interest in it. To me, my child was already a Christian, and bore all the names I desired her to have. But the actual ceremony was evidently invested with a great deal of importance in the eyes of the Power family, and the preparations made for it were immense.

Lord and Lady Claretown, the accepted sponsors, appeared polished and amiable people, and they were always very friendly in their intercourse with me ; but, as I whispered to Juliet, I would much rather that *she* had been going to stand godmother to my child, and I was sure that Hugh would have preferred it also. She gave me a squeeze and a kiss in return for the compliment, but she talked seriously to me of the advantages May would derive from possessing such aristocratic sponsors.

"Advantages which, my dear Katie, you don't seem to me to be fully aware of. You cannot too soon accept the fact that your child, in point of position, is not an ordinary child. She has been born to great wealth and great responsibility, and the more friends we can secure, to help her to live up to the position she must assume in the future, the better."

"She will have you and me," I said ruefully.

"My dear girl, if baby inherits her grandfather's property she will want more than you and me. She will take a very high place amongst the county families, and should marry a man of rank and title and influence. She will be the greatest match in the country. She mustn't be allowed to go to anything under a peer."

The idea of the baby being married made me laugh, yet I was more inclined to cry.

"I hate the thought of the money," I

said vehemently. "I wish there was none at all, or that baby was not to have it. It seems just as if she didn't belong to me."

"Don't talk like that, Katie; it's selfish. If dear Hugh had lived he would have had both title and money. The former must go to my uncle's eldest son, but it is only fair Hugh's child should have the wealth and bestow it worthily. My parents look on little May as the hope of the family. We must try and second their efforts to make her all they wish. And the first thing towards it is to create an interest in her, with such people as Lord and Lady Claretown. They have no children of their own, and will probably take an affection for their godchild, particularly as they knew and liked poor Hugh."

"And *I* am to be nothing then?" I said mournfully.

"You are her mother, Katie. You can be nothing higher or more near. It is your

part to see that no one comes between you. If you wish to keep your child's highest love (as of course you should), see that your affection never fails for her."

These words sank deep into my heart. I pondered over them, and magnified the dangers in prospect for my child, until I began to fancy that all the world was in league to take her from me, and that my mission was to do battle for her affection. I pictured to myself May, grown up, beautiful, stately, and accomplished, turning from her poor little half-educated, dowdy mother, to seek the company of all the lords and ladies of the land, until I trembled at the prospect of what lay before me, and longed to take her in my arms and run away where nobody could ever find us again, so that she might grow up to believe in me as the first person in the world. I grew suspicious and uneasy. I saw in every act of kindness to my baby, a trap to

catch her love, and wean her from me. She was my own and not my own, and I chafed under the thralldom from which I had no means of escaping. The christening-day was a day of torment to me. I don't know why, but notwithstanding the horses and carriages, the dresses, the sponsors, and all the rest of the grandeur, I quite expected to have been allowed to carry my own child in my own arms to church. But Lady Power's look when I suggested the idea was more than surprised—it was indignant.

“I am astonished at your ignorance, Katharine. How came you to think of such a thing? You appear to have totally forgotten you are not of the same faith as ourselves. You can come to church, of course, if you have any interest in seeing the ceremony performed; but were the Archbishop to see you holding the child he would naturally be very much surprised.”

“I really don't see why she shouldn't hold it, mamma,” observed Juliet quietly.

“My dear Juliet! you are so very strange sometimes. You forget Katharine is not one of us. What possible difference can it make to her, who presents our dear infant at the font? I should have thought it was quite against her principles even to accompany us to church; though, of course, if she wishes it——”

“Of course I wish it!” I said stoutly. “I wouldn’t let baby go without me. And I don’t care what she is, Protestant or Catholic, it’s all the same to me; nothing can unmake her my own child.”

“Hush, Katie dear!” interposed my sister-in-law, “You’ve been awfully good in giving in about the name and everything else. Don’t mar the enjoyment of what ought to be a day of thankfulness by disputing a matter of so little consequence as who shall carry the baby.”

“Very good,” I answered, “Lady Clare-town can carry her if she likes.”

“Raikes is the proper person to carry her,” said my mother-in-law grandly; “Lady Claretown’s services will be otherwise required.”

So my beautiful baby, looking a perfect picture in her white satin and lace robes, was conveyed to church in a carriage drawn by grey horses, on the lap of the pompous Mrs. Raikes, whilst the sponsors followed with Lady Power, and I went in humbly, last of all, in company with my sisters-in-law.

Arrived in church, I felt my utter insignificance and unimportance worse than before. I was like a blind man taken to see a show; a deaf man at a concert of music. I saw my baby presented to the Archbishop, whilst Lord and Lady Claretown stood on either side with their hands upon her, and Sir Thomas and Lady Power crowded behind, and my sisters-in-law with other guests brought up the rear; and I

stood outside the circle and saw nothing more. I heard the Archbishop and the attendant priests read a service in Latin, and I knew they were doing something that my baby didn't like, because she began to cry in the middle of the proceedings and never left off again until the end. But that was all; and I felt sulky and out in the cold, and when the rest of the party knelt to pray I was rebellious and remained standing.

I saw one of the priests—an old man with white hair and a very benignant countenance—glance at me kindly and sorrowfully; but my heart felt hard, and I would not kneel. My baby's name was pronounced over her in Latin, but I detected it.

“Hugh Mary Frances Georgina.”

I set my teeth as the two last words left the Archbishop's lips. It was as though they sealed my child the property of the

Claretowns and the Powers. Oh! I was wicked on that blessed christening-day! May God forgive me! When the ceremony was concluded and the party adjourned to the sacristy to sign the register, Mrs. Raikes presented my child to the sponsors and its grandparents to kiss.

"The darling! she's a true child of the Church now," exclaimed Lady Power, as she stooped to embrace her.

"Sweet little lamb! sweet little Frances! You must forgive me, my dear friend; but I fear I shall never think of her except by my own name," said Lady Claretown.

"I hope you never will," replied my mother-in-law warmly. "Indeed I always intended to call her Frances, having a Georgina of my own already."

My heart boiled within me. I was trembling from head to foot. Mrs. Raikes, either unintentionally or by design, appeared to be about to pass me over altogether. Mrs. Delancey recalled her to her duty.

drunk, did make some allusion to me as her mother, and the pleasure which he felt certain I had taken in the demonstration; and then a few eyes turned for a moment upon me, and a girl who sat just opposite exclaimed, "Are you really the baby's mother? Oh, how nice! I had no idea of it, you look so young!" And then it was over, and I sank back into my former obscurity.

Only once more was I roused from my inward longing to get away from the breakfast-table and seek my child, and that was when the Archbishop rose to say a few words about the ceremony we had just witnessed. He alluded to my darling Hugh, remarked what a subject for gratitude it was that, though he was taken away, he had left a child behind him to be reared in the same holy faith to which his ancestors had always belonged, and went on to say he trusted that, by God's

blessing, that child would grow up to tread in the steps of her forefathers, and to cling as closely to the Church into which she had been just received as he felt assured her father—whom he had held in his arms at the font, as he had done her that day—would have done. There was a great deal of emotion displayed at the Archbishop's speech. Sir Thomas was visibly affected; Lady Power and Lady Claretown wiped their eyes more than once; and poor Juliet, sitting by my side, sobbed aloud. *Yet I did not shed a tear.* I, who had loved him as none of them ever could or did—I who, to my irreparable loss, had watched him die—I who had brought his child into the world—I, under this touching allusion to him, remained silent and unmoved. There were greater feelings at work in my bosom at that moment than even love or grief. I was burning with indignation—indignation that they could speak of the loss of

him who was all the world to me, and not remember my great anguish—and trembling with fear—fear at what this complete ignoring of my claims upon Hugh's child portended. I was sick at heart and miserable ; and at last Juliet perceived my condition and smuggled me out of the room. They did not miss me, you may depend on it ; the mother of the heiress of Gentian's Cross was too insignificant a personage to cause a gap at that great table. As soon as the solemn effect produced by the Archbishop's allusion to Hugh's death had passed over, the laughter and jesting and feasting went on as vigorously as before, whilst I sat up in the nursery, and tried to forget my trouble by playing with little May. There, just before the first dressing-bell rang for dinner, I was found by my mother-in-law and Lady Claretown.

“ Oh ! Katharine, are you there ? ” exclaimed the former, as though it were an

unprecedented thing that I should be in my own child's nursery. "Lady Claretown and I have come to bid our little beauty good-night. How well she behaved in church, Raikes! She has a sweet temper, like all my children."

"That she have, my lady. So have Mrs. Delancey's young ladies and gentlemen—all the best of tempers, as I've said over and over again."

"Ah! I know nothing about them. Juliet's children are Delanceys, but this little one is a Power. Well, Miss Frances," she continued, taking the child in her arms, "and how do you like your new names?"

"Very much, grandmamma," exclaimed Lady Claretown, pretending to make the child reply; "but I always mean to be called Frances, after my own godmamma who loves me so much."

Lady Power laughed at this ebullition as

though it had been the rarest wit. I wouldn't laugh.

"So you shall, my pet," she said, addressing the child; "but we musn't stay any longer, or we shall be late for dinner. I should think, Katharine, it must be time you were changing your dress."

"I do not wish to go down to dinner this evening, thank you. I hate a large party."

"Yes! How strange! Not used to it, I suppose. Well, good-night, dear baby."

"Good-night, you sweet godchild!" echoed Lady Claretown effusively. "Take great care of her for me, Mrs. Raikes. You don't know how sharp I am going to look after you now."

"I trust your ladyship will never have occasion to find fault with me," said Raikes, with a smirk. "I'll take good care of the dear child; your ladyship may depend upon me for that; and I hope she'll grow up to

be a credit and a pride to you—that I do.”

“I shall do my best to accomplish it, you may be sure,” replied Lady Claretown. “By the by, that reminds me I have brought a holy-water stoup to hang over her bed. You must be sure and use it for her, night and morning, Mrs. Raikes, until she is old enough to do so for herself.”

And Lady Claretown produced a beautiful little figure in painted china of an angel holding a shell. I glared at it jealously. Here was something again in which I had no part.

Lady Power and Mrs. Raikes were loud in their expressions of admiration for the workmanship of the little bénitier. I looked on and said nothing.

“It *is* pretty,” replied Lady Claretown, “but not half pretty enough for my god-child. Mind it hangs over her cot, Raikes.”

"But the little lady sleeps with her mamma—at present," observed the nurse grimly.

"And I can't have it over *my* bed," I retorted rudely. I am very sorry for it now.

"Oh! ah!" said Lady Claretown. "Well, it must hang in the nursery, then, till baby sleeps by herself; and you can use it for her all the same, nurse."

"Your ladyship's wishes shall be carried out to the letter," replied Raikes pompously; "and everything that *I* can teach the dear child she shall learn. The Blessed Virgin help her, poor innocent lamb!"

I knew the last aspiration was breathed for little May because she had a Protestant mother; and so did the ladies. They sighed audibly, embraced the child again, and, with a curt good-night to me, left the room.

Wicked spirits were raging in me that

evening, and I distorted even acts of kindness into injuries. As my mother-in-law and Lady Claretown left the room I advanced to the mantelpiece, on which lay the newly-presented holy-water stoup, and lifted it for examination.

"Isn't it beautiful!" exclaimed Mrs. Raikes; "so natural-like, and such a heavenly look. Miss Frances is in luck to-day."

"I'll thank you to speak of the child by her proper name," I said tartly. "I have told you she is to be called Miss May."

"Well, her ladyship gives quite a different order," replied the nurse insolently.

"I don't care what her ladyship says or doesn't say. The child is mine, and I have a right to choose her name. At all events, you will never mention her before me except as Miss May."

I had never yet presumed to speak so authoritatively to her, and Mrs. Raikes was quite taken by surprise.

"I never heard such chopping and changing before," she grumbled. "What with one person and another person, and one name and another name, I don't know if I'm standing on my head or my heels.

"I suppose you know who is the child's mother?" I said grandly.

"Oh! yes, ma'am, of course; and I've no wish to interfere myself, but her ladyship's very particular, and I'm living on her wages; so when she and Lady Claretown—"

"What's Lady Claretown to me!" I exclaimed indignantly as I swept my arm off the mantelpiece where it had been resting. The movement was fatal to the holy-water stoup, which came down with a crash and was smashed in the fender.

"Oh, Lor'! now that *was* an ill-natured thing to do!" exclaimed Mrs. Raikes in her odiously familiar manner. "A stoup as must have cost a couple of pounds if it cost a shilling. And when I had just pro-

mised her godmamma to use the holy water night and morning !”

“What nonsense!” I cried angrily, and without condescending to explain it had been an accident. “As if it would do her any good! I’m very glad the stupid thing is broken. I never heard such rubbish in my life.”

I was not speaking the truth; for if I had not learned to believe in my dead Hugh’s religion, I had too much reverence for it and for him to disbelieve.

But rage had taken possession of me. My poor childish heart was smarting under a sense of injury and neglect, and I was ready to fight against anything that threatened to raise a barrier between me and the child of my affections. Have you not often seen some poor dumb mother—a dog or cat, perhaps—when the children of the family come to handle and admire her newly-born litter of puppies or kittens? How the poor

brute trembles with anxiety as each blind, squealing baby is lifted from the basket—how her meek eye follows the rough hand that suspends her treasure in mid-air—how uneasily she whines (or mews) in answer—how plainly she implores for it to be restored to her! She knows well enough her master will not hurt her little one. She believes that he is more powerful than herself—better able, perhaps, to take care of it. Yet she trembles—she knows not why—and the loving whine, or purr, with which she receives it back—the eagerness with which she curls her body right round it to conceal it from view—the happy, contented expression on her face as she looks up again—tell in a breath the miserable suspense she has gone through. I have often thought that my feelings (at the period of life of which I am now speaking) were very much like those of a dumb animal. The instinct of motherhood was strong within

me, and I stood alone. There was no father to put his strong arm about my child and me, and tell us not to fear! I knew the Powers were better capable of rearing and providing for my baby than myself, and that, in a measure, she belonged to them; and I felt as if, day by day, she were slipping from my grasp into theirs.

Oh! I was miserable. I hardly know how to explain my feelings; but I was very miserable. The baby who had come to be such a joy to me was turning into a source of unhappiness and discontent. Even in her religion I was to be divided from her. Her nurses and godparents were to teach her to pray; her mother could not kneel in the same church, nor use the same prayers. Not that I thought much of one church over another, nor had any decided views on any subject; but I was in that frame of mind when everything fretted me, and I was ready to make an evil even out of the

pretty present that Lady Claretown had given to my baby, and I had smashed, without remorse, upon the hearthstone. Mrs. Raikes professed to be horribly shocked at my profanity, and I was sorry for the words directly I had spoken them ; but I was too angry and too proud to say I had been wrong, and quitted the nursery without further parley, leaving her to pick up the broken pieces of the angel holding out the shell.

CHAPTER XVI.

A RASH RESOLVE.

AFTER-CIRCUMSTANCES led me to believe that Mrs. Raikes repeated to her mistress what I had said and done relative to baby's name and the holy-water stoup, but Lady Power never alluded to the subject before me. Juliet did—and as far as I was able, I gave her an explanation of my conduct; but her mother kept silence. Only her manners grew more distant towards me from that day, and she was scrupulous in calling my infant by the name she knew I disliked; whilst I as scrupulously clung to that of my own choice. It was a regular battle between us when the child appeared, who

should address her first as "May," or "Frances." And that warfare raged till Lady Power's dying day.

The period of my sister Juliet's visit to Gentian's Cross was now drawing to a close, and I looked forward to her departure with dismay. She was the only one of Hugh's sisters to whom I had in the least felt drawn. Margaret and Blanche and Norah were simple nonentities.

But before that time arrived I had quite made up my mind, as I thought, to leave Ireland.

I was not decided where to go. Sometimes I thought of taking apartments near Juliet in London, or Aunt Tessie in Guildford. I would rather even have returned to the monotony and prosiness of Ivy Cottage, than remained beneath the chilling and uncongenial influence of Gentian's Cross.

But when I spoke of my intention to

Mrs. Delancey, I was mortified and disappointed to find she was totally opposed to it. More than that, she appeared astonished at the idea, as if it were an impossibility; and I had so fully expected to receive her sympathy and advice, that the effect of my confidence took me completely by surprise.


"You couldn't do it, Katie," she said decisively. "It is absurd to think of such a thing. What *would* you do with that child, alone in lodgings?"

"But I shouldn't be alone: of course I should have a nurse for her."

"A servant is no companion or protector. You are too young to live by yourself. And what do you know of housekeeping!"

"I can learn."

"Nonsense! You must put the idea out of your head altogether. If you were wealthy, and could command proper chaperonage, and have a retinue of servants, it might be different; but nothing could jus-



tify your leaving the shelter of Gentian's Cross for furnished lodgings. My father wouldn't hear of it."

"But, Juliet, I can't live here always!"

"Why not? What is more natural than that you should make Hugh's house yours—particularly as your child is to inherit it? I am quite sure my parents would never consent to part with the baby, and I don't suppose you would like to leave her behind."

"Leave my baby behind! Oh, Juliet! as if I could!"

"Just so. But don't you see the folly of taking her away? Here she is surrounded by every luxury and advantage, and will be reared as befits her station in life. In lodgings with you, she would not be likely to have the same attendance or comforts, and her health would in all probability suffer. But it is no use discussing the contingencies, because I am convinced

my parents would never let her go. I don't think they ought."

"But, Juliet, that is the very thing that makes me so unhappy! My child seems to belong much more to them than to me."

"Poor little Katie!" replied my sister-in-law, stroking my hair. "No, dear; that can never be. Don't fret yourself about that. But she *does* belong to Gentian's Cross, and Derry Lodge, and half-a-dozen other places; and it is only right, under the circumstances, that she should be brought up on her own property, and amongst her own people. Your faith, too, Katie, is a serious obstacle to your being allowed to bring up your child alone. How *could* you teach her properly, or set her a good example? I don't blame you for your religion, dear, remember, but we can't serve two masters. And added to all this, Katie, I don't think you *can* take her away without my father's sanction."

“What do you mean? I have plenty of money—more than I should want.”

“My poor child! you haven’t a half-penny that is legally your own. Dear Hugh had just come into his little property, but he died without making a will, and by rights it all passes to his sisters. We don’t want it, remember, nor would we touch it; but still it is not yours, except by courtesy, and would be a strong weapon in my father’s hand, if you attempted to go against his wishes in this matter.”

I was silent. I saw the meshes of the net closing around me.

“I could not speak so confidently in this matter, Katie dear,” resumed my sister-in-law kindly, “had I not heard it discussed by my parents. They cannot help seeing you are not happy here, and I think they are sorry for it; but Hugh’s child is naturally everything to them (what a pity it is she was not a boy, to inherit the title!),

and they will go any lengths sooner than part with her to be brought up in a Protestant atmosphere. So long as you remain at Gentian's Cross, my father will be only too happy to continue your allowance; but were you to propose leaving it with the child, I am afraid he would be inclined to refuse it. And then you would be penniless! And why should you wish to go, dear Katie? You are not so much of a stranger here as you were, and your baby is well cared for and happy, and every day things will improve. Try to look on it as your home, dear—at all events until you leave it for another."

"How *can* I leave it for another," I said savagely, "when you say I have not a half-penny to buy bread with?"

"I meant *should* you ever wish to leave it for another, Katie. We have not, of course, been able to help contemplating such a contingency. You are so young

still, dear—and you are growing so pretty—it is not likely you will remain here to the end of your days.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

I really did not know to what she alluded.

“I mean that, in all probability, you will marry again some day, and then, perhaps, you will not mind leaving dear baby as a legacy to papa and mamma.”

“*Marry again!*” I cried, in a tone of disgust. “Marry again!—when Hugh——”

But here I broke down, and ended my rhapsody in a flood of tears. It was long before my sister-in-law could console me. To marry again!—to forget all about my darling boy lying cold and dead in his coffin beneath the ground of Père-la-Chaise, whilst some other man called himself my husband, and talked to me as Hugh had talked! Oh! it seemed too horrible!—too unnatural—too sacrilegious to my young inno-

cent mind; and I had received a coarse shock from which it was some time before I recovered. And when I did, it was to cling with still greater fervour to the idea of never parting with my precious child! I felt as if that was what the Powers had been trying to do all along! To disgust me with Gentian's Cross, and themselves, and everything concerning them, so that I might be glad to forget my dear dead love, and all his sweet ways and words, and to rush to the home of anybody else and leave my Hugh's child behind me! But no! no! no! They might do what they liked, but it was all useless! They should *never, never* make me false to my lost lover, nor to the child he had left behind him! So I told Mrs. Delancey, clinging to her and sobbing as if my heart would break. I think she was frightened at the storm which she had raised. I know she tried hard to console me; assured me over and over again

that my fidelity to Hugh's memory would only endear me to his parents ; and that the last thing they wished to do was to separate me from my baby. But she entreated me, therefore, for Hugh's sake, to try and be reconciled to the idea of living in the place where he was born, and where, if he were still cognizant of what passed on earth, she felt sure he would be glad to know that I was safe under the protection of his parents.


This argument had more effect on me than any other ; and though the conversation left me unhappy and unsettled, after a little while I did become reconciled to the idea of living at Gentian's Cross—and particularly as Juliet assured me that she should often be there herself, and made me promise, as soon as baby should be old enough to leave home, to pay her an annual visit in London.

She left Ireland ; the guests who had

been assembled during the fine weather dispersed; the autumn days began to close in; the family at Gentian's Cross was drawn more closely together—and then a new worry assailed me. I no longer felt such a stranger in their home circle; but I was still a stranger to their faith, and because little May was not, the fact had power to gall me.


I could have borne very well to see my father and mother and sisters-in-law set off to attend mass every Sunday morning, whilst I walked by myself to pray in the whitewashed barn that did duty for a Protestant church in that vicinity. It was not separation from them in such matters that disturbed my mind; it was the thousand and one little instances that took place at home, in which my child and their religion were coupled together, that made me long to be a Catholic. They would not dare to ignore me then as they did now (so

I said to myself), nor to make arrangements for little May's future bringing-up without any reference to what I wished or approved of. This feeling was very strong on me soon after the christening. When Father Ferguson, who was the family director, paid his usual weekly call, I could not bear to see my baby brought down to him, and to hear the blessing pronounced on her from which I knew I was excluded. I chafed under a sense of injury at each fresh present, chiefly tokens of her faith, which her aunts or other relations made her. I could have smashed the images and pictures with which her nursery was adorned; and my indignation reached its height one day when Mrs. Raikes (who, like many of her class, was very superstitious) dipped a silver medal, which little May usually wore round her neck, into the holy-water stoup, because, in playing with the child, I had thrown the chain over my



own head. I did not call out, as on a former occasion, that it was nonsense ; but I walked out of the nursery, and went for a long ramble, sadly brooding on the division this circumstance of difference of faith might create in the future between my baby and myself. And it was during this walk that the question suggested itself to me, "Why should I not become a Catholic also?" As I have said before, I had no real feeling on the subject. It is true that, since my baby's birth, I had begun to use the habit of prayer, but it was more from an idea of duty than of pleasure ; there was no religion in my heart. I was very ignorant on such matters, but I knew that Protestants did sometimes turn Catholics, because my Hugh had more than once spoken to me about it, even during the short time we were together.

And, perhaps, as strong a wish to be more closely united to my dead lover, as to



- my living child, urged me to the step I eventually decided on. Any way, I thought of and brooded on the subject for some days, until I arrived at what I conceived to be a grand and lofty resolution. I would become a Catholic !

I did not consult my mother nor sisters-in-law. That would have seemed to me a childish proceeding, unworthy of my age and dignity. No ! what I intended to do was to keep the business quite secret until some day some allusion more than usually aggravating should be made to my religion, when I should majestically reply, "You are entirely mistaken in your surmises, for I am a Catholic like yourselves !"

I imagined Lady Power's look of mystified incredulity—her daughters' ridicule—and finally my own triumph when the truth was revealed. And mingled with this, I fear, was not a little self-satisfaction at the idea that, however openly they might

congratulate me on the event, they would secretly be much discomforted to think that thenceforth I might claim a voice in all matters of discussion relative to my baby's religious education.

Filled with this notion, I next began to consider how best to carry it out. I could not conceive there would be any difficulty. I had been reared in the belief that Roman Catholics were a species of roaring lions, going about and seeking whom they might devour; and that, very far from refusing or hesitating to receive members of any other sect into their Church, they were only too ready to drag them in by main force, and baptize them against their will; after which act they became completely in the power of the priests, and would be subjected to the most frightful persecution—indeed, made away with secretly, if they ever attempted to enter an alien place of worship again. I believed this, but it did

not frighten me, for I knew, for my baby's sake, I should never wish even to be thought to be a Protestant. So, being well aware on what days the Power family usually frequented their church, I chose one on which I was not likely to encounter them, and walked in boldly to speak to Father Ferguson.

It was on a Friday in December, at about four o'clock in the afternoon. How well I remember the day! The church was lighted up for benediction; indeed, the service was going on as I arrived, and I had to wait till its conclusion. When it was ended, I was not ignorant where to find Father Ferguson, for I had accompanied my sisters-in-law to confession more than once, and knew the door by which they entered his confessional. As I closed it behind me my heart beat rather fast, still I had no doubt of the issue of my application. I knelt down by the per-

forated-zinc window which divided me from the priest, and said without hesitation :

“ I am Mrs. Hugh Power—Katie, you know, Father Ferguson.”

The father knew me well by name and sight, although he had not often spoken to me ; but his voice did not express any surprise as he answered :

“ Well, my daughter, and what do you want of me ? ”

“ I want to be a Catholic. I want you to receive me into the Church. How soon can you do it ? ”

“ This is rather a sudden resolution on your part ; is it not ? ”

“ Yes !—no, I mean. I’ve wanted it for a long time. You *will* do it, won’t you, father ? ”

“ I must first hear some of your reasons, my child, for desiring to make so important a change.”

“ My reasons ! ” I stammered.

“Yes! How long is it since you desired to be a Catholic?”

“Ever since I came here, I think.”

“And why do you wish it?”

“Oh, because of baby, father! I must be the same religion as baby! and poor Hugh, too. I don’t seem to belong to him or to his people; and Lady Power is always saying—”

“Hush, my child! Tell me of yourself, not of others. You have been reared in the Protestant faith, and you wish to change it for that of The Church, not because you have, by God’s grace, been convinced that it *is* The Church, but because your husband died in it, and your infant has been baptized into it. Am I right?”

“Yes, father,” I answered meekly.

“It is a laudable wish on your part to be able to instruct your child in the mysteries of her faith, and an affectionate

wish to belong to that in which your husband died; but wishes are not sufficient to make you a Catholic, my daughter. For that purpose you must have nothing less than belief."

"But if you baptize me, I shall be a Catholic, father."

"You will be a Catholic in name; but that is not enough for your salvation. Can you assure me that you believe the Catholic Church to be the one only Church founded by Jesus Christ during His sojourn upon earth!"

"Oh, yes!" I answered, without thinking, and only desirous to gain my end. "I would give anything to belong to It."

"If your child were a Protestant you would give her up to enter the Catholic Church?"

I stopped and shuddered. I was not a liar! I could not answer "Yes."

"Well, my daughter?"

"Father Ferguson, how could I give up my child?—my own child—the only thing that I have left."

"And God?" he said interrogatively.

"And God," I repeated, feeling dreadfully confused, and not knowing what he meant.

"What of him? If this Church is His true Church, and he founded it, is He to come before your child, or after her?"

I saw my error on the moment.

"You are right," I answered. "I cannot be a Catholic."

"God forbid that I should say that, or think it! I trust in His mercy that you will at some future day (and that not a far distant one) be a Catholic. But you are not one now, my child; and until by faith you are so, you must not dream of entering the Church."

Utterly dispirited, but told by conscience there was no alternative, I rose to go.

"I am so sorry I troubled you for nothing," I said, with conventional politeness.

"You have not troubled me for nothing," replied Father Ferguson. "I hope I shall see you often now, and talk with you upon the subject that interests you. By the way, may I ask what your father and mother-in-law say to your proposition?"

"I have not asked them, father."

"You have consulted no one but myself?"

"No one. I wanted to become a Catholic," I went on, regardless now whether he knew my motives or not, "because baby is one, and they always seem to think that I am nobody, and I shouldn't be able to teach her her prayers, or anything when she gets bigger, and it makes me miserable."

"You will not mind seeing me occasion-

ally when I call at Gentian's Cross ?" he demanded.

"Oh! no, father, of course not; that is, if you won't tell Lady Power I came here, will you?"


"I will not, since you wish it. But I should like to see you in my church now and then; and you will let me lend you a few little books that will explain to you the subject on which at present, if you will forgive my saying so, you are very ignorant."

"I will come when I can," I answered, alluding to his first request, "and I will read the books. But, father, you will not tell Lady Power, will you?"

"Are you afraid of Lady Power, my child?"

I nodded. He was silent. Then, after a pause, he said:

"The books I propose to lend you will, I trust, make clear to you how great a sin



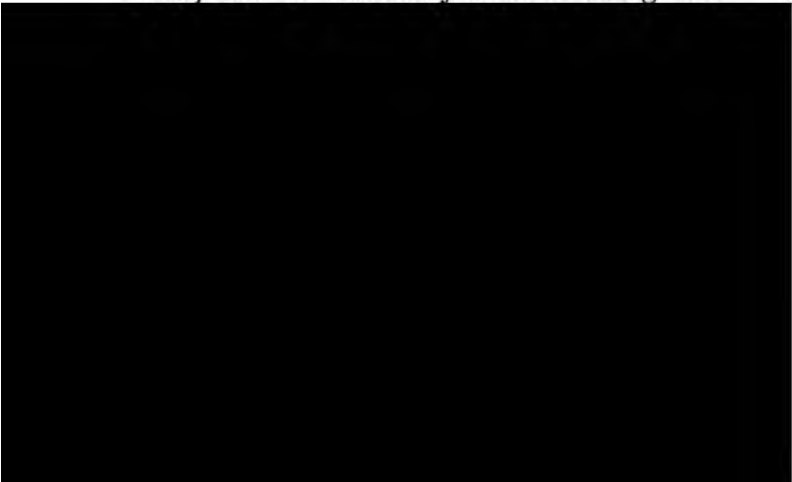
you would have been guilty of had you entered the Church, as you desired—without thought, or belief, or prayer—merely to gratify what may prove a passing wish to gain an ascendancy over your child. What age is your child now?”

“Ten months. She has got four teeth,” I added eagerly.

“Long before she is of an age to receive religious instruction, I trust you may be in a position to become her teacher,” he said kindly. “With God’s help, I will do all in my power to make you so. But we must have truth before everything—perfect truth and perfect trust—or our best endeavours will end in defeat. I will send you the books I spoke of, and I trust that the perusal of them may be blessed to you. When that time arrives, my child, come back to me, and I will welcome you with gladness. Until it arrives, pray—pray earnestly that the right path may be pointed out to you ;

but beware how you attempt to use God's means to effect your own will. And now you must go—others are waiting to speak to me. May God bless you, my child, and bring you home to the true faith; but till He brings you, do not come again.”

I do not know if Father Ferguson's last words were judicious ones; the effect they had on me was to prevent my ever reposing confidence in him again. I read the pamphlets he sent to me, and I saw him occasionally in the presence of my mother-in-law; but I studiously avoided being left



any amount of sophistry and persuasion would have had.

I perceived that, instead of thinking any one good enough to be a Catholic, he considered the Catholic religion much too good for any one, and I respected it and him accordingly. During the rest of my stay at Gentian's Cross I made no further sign to him or any one ; but the seeds of the faith which was destined to console my later years were sown through the instrumentality of Father Ferguson. I did not think deeply, but I thought continuously. Scarcely a day or an hour passed but something occurred to recall his solemn warning to my mind, and I found myself constantly comparing my state of feeling with the example he had set up for me.

The consequence of which was, that I never went back to him. Doubtless it was all ordered for the best. Had I become a Catholic at that period of my existence, I might have

been a cold, careless, and irreligious one. I might have learned the mysteries of the religion without reverencing them, and have engaged in its prayers without understanding them. It is well for me that it was not so. I returned from that single interview with Father Ferguson to the cares, pleasures, and duties that awaited me in that little circle which was bounded by the four walls that enclosed the nursery of my child.


And there, for ten, if not happy at least not unhappy, years, I nursed, loved, played with, and watched over her. There, from sixteen years of age to six-and-twenty, I was solely and completely the companion, nurse, and mother of my own child.

CHAPTER XVII.

TEN YEARS OF CHANGE.

I AM aware that I have spent too much time already in recalling the history of May's childhood. To the general reader it cannot be very interesting to learn how soon my baby cut her teeth, at what age she began to run alone, and whether flesh, fowl, or fish agreed best with her constitution. And even now I should pause to tear up all that has gone before, or humbly ask the pardon of my hearers, were it not that the seemingly puerile details into which I have been compelled to enter are stringently necessary to the further working out of the story of our two lives. For how else could


I have made you understand the means, the circumstances (apparently so trivial, and yet which had so powerful an effect upon my first years) by which my child became to me, what she ever remained, the very core and essence of my being? Ordinary mothers and ordinary children cannot comprehend the feeling. They must have been placed in the same position that I was—they must have had every other tie plucked up by the roots, and been left to weather the storm alone—amidst uncongenial influences and spirits, with but one little bud of promise to cling to—one little heart left of all the world to love them—one little tongue to prattle words of sympathy and affection, before they can even realise what I grew up to feel for my own child. After the first year that I spent at Gentian's Cross, the time passed smoothly enough. I had been like a young horse first put into harness, that frets and chafes against the restraint of



girth and band and buckle ; but when I found resistance unavailing, I learned to go quietly, and, if I was not exuberantly happy, I became at least content. It was a great consolation to me to know that, if my home was not all I could desire, it was the home in which my Hugh had been reared from babyhood to manhood, and to see my little girl running about the same paths he had trotted over, swinging in the same swing, and even riding on the same old pony, now very grey about the muzzle and stiff about the legs, which had been purchased for Hugh's use when a little boy. How baby and I (it was long before I could break myself of the habit of calling her baby) loved that patient, worn-out old animal!—how we kissed it, for the sake of dear papa in heaven!—and how indignant we became if any one dared to use a stick to it, or in any way to treat it roughly ! For though, as time went on, my feelings with regard to my

young husband's death became more softened—though I could speak his name without a burst of tears, and even recall some of his sunny ways and words with smiles—still I was very faithful to the memory of my early love, and never a thought entered my head that it was possible that I should either forget him or replace him. I think it was this circumstance as much as any other that brought Lady Power round at last to love me, or, at least, to *like* me.

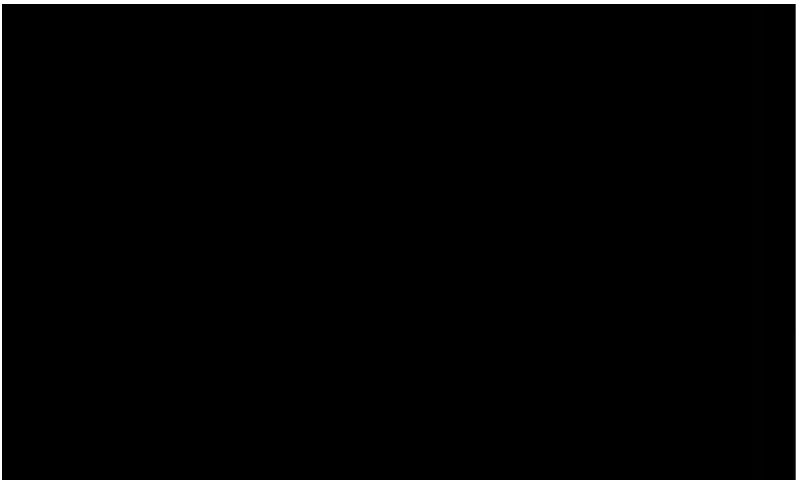
I know that it had much influence over Sir Thomas's affection for me, and that it induced him to name me in his will, as though I had been his own daughter. And whatever reward my fidelity brought to me, indeed there was no sham about it. I was earnestly, truly, solely devoted to the memory of Hugh. The continuous lesson I repeated to my little May in bed bore its fruit, to my great delight, in her first effort at speaking, which resulted in the syllable



“Hoo!” How hysterical the sound made me! How I cried and laughed over my clever baby!—and kissed her—and kissed the precious likeness which she tried to name! From that hour I spoke more to her of “Hoo” than ever. The first stories she heard were stories of “Hoo”—the first prayer she prayed was to see “Hoo” in heaven—the first present I made her, the value of which she could understand, was a copy of the portrait of “Hoo.” My baby learned that she was “Hoo’s” baby long before she knew that she was mine; and she learned to pity me because “Hoo” was gone away, long before I taught her to rejoice that she had come to comfort me instead. When my May met her father in the better world, he had no need for reproach that she had not been taught to love his memory. Bear witness for me, my Hugh, how faithful and tender a heart you left behind you!—a heart which, after

passing through a storm of trouble, which made your loss appear a snow-flake, has but one hope, one prayer, one desire—to be reunited to yours in the youth and innocence of heaven !


My baby throve through all the stages of infancy, from a fat, dimpled creature, unable to run alone, tumbling about the place, all smiles and coos, to a sweet, engaging little child of three years old. At this juncture, to my great delight, Mrs. Raikes left Lady Power's service. She had received an offer to superintend the nursery



that hung round her head—to dress her in her dainty little suits of needlework and cambric, and then to gaze at her, and feel that she was all my own. I believe I was just as often taken for her nursemaid as not, particularly when we went for long rambles together unattended—May seated on the old pony that had carried my blessed Hugh, and I walking by her side carrying a basketful of dolls and other rubbish, which my darling insisted upon taking with her wherever she went. It was of no use Lady Power and my sisters-in-law trying to persuade me to accompany them to the balls or other festivities in Dublin; nothing on earth could induce me to leave my child even for a few hours, and the consequence was that May, like all children when made too much of, became imperious and tyrannical, and ordered me about like a slave! Yet I was a happy slave—a slave who hugged his chains! If, even for a moment,


I pretended to be angry with her, one flash from those grey-blue eyes—one reproachful baby glance from Hugh's child—would bring me flying to her side to kiss away her tears or look of gloom. The little rascal knew her power, too, and exercised it fully. It was enough for her to say, "Hoo's baby wants dat," or "Oo's very cross to Hoo's child!" to melt her girlish mother into tears, and make her ready to go down on her knees and ask her tyrant's pardon for ever having dared to dispute her wishes or refuse her anything.

Lady Power remonstrated with me more than once upon what she termed my infatuation; she also tried hard to persuade me to go into society, and throw off my mourning; but I combated all her arguments with but one reply, that May was Hugh's child, and I could no more leave her than I could forget him. And his mother, however soon her own wound had



healed, could hardly find fault with such reasoning as mine. My greatest pleasure, perhaps, was visiting Mrs. Delancey in Park Lane, which I did each year. But even then I advanced very little in knowledge of the world. I would not accompany my sister-in-law out in the evenings, though May were safe and sound asleep in bed; neither would I join in any pleasures by day in which she could not take a share; and though I still professed to be a Protestant, I always went to mass when the child went. This may appear to be such an exaggeration of maternal love as to call for ridicule rather than sympathy; but then it must be remembered that I had never tasted the doubtful pleasures of dissipation. I did not, therefore, miss them. My experience of life had been so simple and unvaried, that it was quite enough diversion for me to work for my little girl, and attend on her and romp with her; and when we did

go together to such places as Madame Tussaud's, the Zoological Gardens, or an afternoon pantomime, my delight and surprise were quite as unbounded as her own. In fact, we were two children together, and at twenty years of age I was almost as unsophisticated as May was at four. From that time she grew rapidly, promising to be a much larger and taller woman than myself, who still remained very slight, very youthful-looking, and about the middle height. When May was seven, Lady Power thought it right that she should have a governess, and a lady of the name of Lamotte was engaged to conduct her education. Shall I be believed when I say that I immediately went in for studying with my child? At first, with the idea of easing the lessons which so often blistered my darling's face with tears, and then from the discovery how dreadfully ignorant I was, and a laudable desire to improve myself. "What



next?" cried Lady Power on entering the schoolroom one day, and finding me thus employed. "My dear Katharine, I should never be surprised to see you put on one of Frances' pinafores and walk in to dessert. We shall have you changing places by-and-by. She grows so rapidly, and you refuse to grow at all. We shan't be able to distinguish soon which is the mother and which is the child."

"Katie's my mother of course!" said pert Miss May. (She always called me "Katie," the little rogue! and sometimes "Hoo's own Katie!" for which I had no heart to rebuke her.)


"I wish she would keep you in better order then," replied Lady Power, though she looked proudly at her the while. "Your mother's too good to you, Frances. She thinks too much of you, and too little of herself. I hope you will never forget it when you are a big girl."

It was occasional remarks like these that reconciled me to Gentian's Cross as a home.

I don't think a more elegant, graceful child than my May, at ten years old, could possibly be imagined.

She had grown out of all baby fat and chubbiness at that period, and was tall, slim, and upright as a poplar. Her large grey-blue eyes (Ah! my love! those eyes! those eyes!) looked out from a framework of long, dark lashes, beneath two delicately pencilled eyebrows; her complexion was fair, her nose good, her mouth small and dewy; her hair, of the palest gold, had lost all its curl, and lay silken and straight upon her shoulders. She was remarkably healthy, although not robust, and her whole appearance was striking and aristocratic.

Of her disposition I say nothing—these pages will reveal it. To me she was simply perfect; a thing to be gazed at and gloried



in ; a creature whom I could never thank God sufficiently for making my own child. When May was ten years old, an event occurred that filled us all with grief.

Sir Thomas Power died. The old man, although not of sufficiently determined and resolute a character to inspire an absorbing attachment, was yet so good and kindly disposed to all around him, that his death created a void greater perhaps than would have been entailed by the loss of a more vigorous nature. From the watch-dog in the kennel, to the wife of his bosom, everybody missed him. And I, perhaps, most of all. For I had lived so secluded and quiet an existence at Gentian's Cross that small things pleased me more than they did other people, and my father-in-law's habitual attention had sunk very deep into my heart. When he died, I knew that I had cared for him more than all the rest of the household put together. I remembered his kind-

ness at Hugh's deathbed, and all the memory of that mournful time revived to make me mourn still more deeply the loss of the only one who had shared it with me.

The whole family naturally assembled at the funeral ; and then I heard, to my surprise, that my father-in-law had left me five hundred pounds a year, settled on me unconditionally until my death, and that Lady Power only held Gentian's Cross, and Derry Lodge, and the other properties of which dear Hugh would have been the owner, until my little May should have reached the age of twenty-one years, when she would inherit them with an income of five thousand pounds—small enough to keep up such expensive places on, but, in my inexperienced eyes, a fortune of untold expanse.

I was very grateful for my dear father-in-law's remembrance of me. The knowledge that I was only a dependent on my husband's family had often risen up to vex

and humble me. Now I was independent—free to go where I would; and though I had long since given up the idea of breaking away from Hugh's people, the certainty of freedom gave me a pleasure I had never yet tasted, and stood me in good stead but a very short time after it had been bestowed on me.

Mrs. Delancey and Lady Power had several conversations together relative to the best means of carrying on my child's education. They admitted me freely to these discussions—as, indeed, they did now to everything that concerned myself or May. She could hardly be said to have learnt anything from Miss Lamotte, for she was of too high-spirited a nature ever to derive much advantage from home instruction.

“Just like poor dear Hugh!” said Lady Power, with a sigh.

“Just like my own lost darling!” I echoed, exulting in the undoubted likeness

May displayed, both in looks and character, to her dead father.

“Mother, we couldn’t do better—Katie couldn’t do better, if she only knew—than send her to our dear Mère Anastase, at the Convent of L’Enfant Jésus,” said Mrs. Delancey.

“But where is that?” I demanded.


“In Brussels, dear; in the very best *quartier*. I and my elder sisters were all educated there. Mère Anastase is the dearest, kindest old thing in the world, and the girls have every possible advantage. Sooner or later May must leave us, Katie. It is quite out of the question she can be educated here; and why not in Brussels, as well as anywhere else?”

“But I shall go too!” I said, eagerly.

“Do you think it would be worth while?”

“*Worth while!* Do you suppose I would part with her?”

“You can’t live in the convent; it’s not allowed.”



“ Can’t I live near ? ”

“ Perhaps: but I repeat my question—is it worth while? You will have her home for the holidays. Come, Katie, be reasonable. May is no longer a baby. It is time she was weaned from you, and you from her.”

“ Oh, Juliet, don’t speak like that! I will be reasonable and good. I will let her go to the convent of ‘L’Enfant Jésus,’ if Lady Power thinks it best. But let me go too!—let me go too!”

I was crying now. My mother-in-law, strange to say, was the one to console me. I think her late affliction had softened her heart.

“ Of course you shall go too, if you wish it, Katharine. We were thinking of your own comfort, my dear. How will you relish living alone ? ”

“ I care for nothing so long as I can go with my child. I would die sooner than part with her ! ”

"Darling Katie! no one shall ask you to do it," whispered Juliet.

"Certainly not," seconded my mother-in-law. "I am sure I need not tell you, Katharine, that Frances' welfare is as dear to my heart as to that of any one. My only wish is to see her virtuous and happy, and fit to adorn the position to which she has been born as my son's daughter. And to that end I feel she must leave Gentian's Cross. Therefore, since it is decided that Frances had better leave home for the purposes of education, there can be no fitter place for her to go to than the convent school, where so many of my daughters were brought up, and where our name will be a passport for her welcome."

"You need say no more, mother. Katie perfectly understands," said Juliet.

"I perfectly understand," I echoed; and the matter was decided on, then and there.

was old enough by that time to see

the sense of their proposal, and sufficiently independent to be rather pleased than otherwise at the prospect, when once I was familiarised with it. To have been parted from my darling would have been agony to me. To go with her to new scenes and places was pleasure, even though we were to be occasionally separated from one another. It is true that I was assailed with many qualms and tears before the time of our starting for Brussels arrived; but my sister, Mrs. Delancey, volunteered to see us safely over the Channel, and comfortably settled in our new quarters, and the journey, therefore, took more the appearance of a party of pleasure, than the setting out upon a new and untried phase of existence.

CHAPTER XVIII.


A NEW HOME.

It was about this time that my child's character appeared to change. She was not less happy or less easily pleased than she had been heretofore, but she grew older and more thoughtful. She felt as much, but she considered more. The meaning of our two lives, thrown so completely upon each other for support, seemed suddenly to burst upon her comprehension: and from the time that May and I recommenced, as it were, the journey of life together, my child developed into an anxious, earnest little woman. The fact is that, until her grandfather's death, my daughter had

scarcely realised there were such things in the world as loss and pain and sorrow. Then—for the first time, that she could remember—she saw me really grieved, and when that change was followed by separation from the only home and only friends she had ever known, and she was cast upon a new world alone with me, May waked up to the knowledge of what we were to one another—of what my life would have been too, perhaps, had she not been given to comfort me. From the time we left Gentian's Cross, and she perceived my qualms of fear at being launched upon a new sphere of action, her solicitude for me became most touching. She would scarcely leave my side for a minute ; all her thought appeared to be whether I ate well and slept well—if I were happy and comfortable. Her fears when we got on board the steamer to cross to Calais—not for herself, but for me—lest *I* should be sick or uneasy, or fall over-

board, or catch cold, were the remark of all the passengers.

Juliet laughed at the child's anxiety, and said she was growing a greater baby than ever. I knew the deep love from which it sprang, and pressed her to my heart in silent gratitude. My sister-in-law could not stay in Brussels beyond a few days. The convent to which May was to go as a weekly boarder, returning to me each Saturday till Monday, was situated in one of the large *places* of the town; and suitable apartments were soon found for me within a stone's throw of it. Juliet wanted me to settle nearer the English part of the population—by the Rue Montagne, or in the Quartier Louise—but I would not go one door farther away from my darling than was absolutely necessary. I had brought a very nice servant over with me—one used to travel on the Continent—and with her assistance, and the help of a *fille de quartier*,



I hoped to manage perfectly well in my tiny establishment of four rooms.

It was a lovely evening in September ; my sister-in-law had just left us to return to England ; May and I were alone. We had been unpacking our things and arranging our rooms all the afternoon, and my dear child was tired. She brought a stool, and sat down at my feet, and put her head upon my knee. I bent and kissed her.

“Are you very tired, my darling ?”

“A little, mothie.” She always called me “mothie” then. It was a name of her own invention, and so I preferred it to all others.

“How do you like the convent, May ?” (She had been introduced to Mère Anastase and her new companions only the day before.) “Is it not all very sweet, and solemn, and quiet ?”

“Not in the schoolroom, mothie. They were making noise enough there.”

"And you will add to it, I have no doubt. But you think you will like school, don't you?"

"Yes, mothie."

"Why are you so silent, my child?"

"Mothie dear! tell me! Why did you come with me to Brussels?"

The question took me completely by surprise.

"*Why did I come with you?* Oh, May! how can you ask? Because I love you so much, my darling. Do you think that your poor mother could live without you?"

She pushed away her stool, and got upon my lap, and nestled her face close to mine.

"But all mothers don't do it," she whispered. "The girls stared so yesterday when I told them you had come to live here too. Their mothers live in England, or Paris, or somewhere. Don't they care for their children, mothie?"

"Oh, yes! they must care for them," I

replied vaguely. "All mothers love their little girls, of course; only perhaps they don't care for them *quite* so much as I do for you, darling."

"Why do you care so much for me, mothie?"

"Oh, May! don't ask me! How shall I ever make you understand? Because you are my only child—you are everything I possess. The world would be as black as night to me if you were gone."

"Would it be black if Hugh were here?" asked May, with a child's unconsciousness of giving pain. I pressed her closer to me, but I did not answer. It had happened eleven years ago, but the wound bled at times still.


"Tell me all about Hugh, mothie," continued May coaxingly. "About the long walks you used to take in the woods together, and how you jumped out of your bed-room window into the apple-tree, and

how Jane sent you up bread and cheese in a basket. Do ! mothie."

The story was a familiar one which had been told to Hugh's child over and over again, and accompanied, of late years, by many a smile over my own naughtiness, and May's amusement at the recital. But somehow on that night I could not tell it in the same strain.

I was in a foreign land again—alone once more, save for the dear fair head nestled in my bosom—and the remembrance of the past came back to me too solemnly and seriously to be coined into a lively tale.

I could not speak of the happy part of my brief married life that evening ; all my thoughts were tinged with the reason May had demanded of me, *Why I loved my child so much ?* And in a subdued voice I began to speak to her of her father's illness and death, and, as far as I *could* speak to a child, of our love for one another. I did not cry



as I recalled it. My eyes may have been suffused for a moment, but the memory, though sacred, was much softened by time, and it was only on occasions now that it had the power to upset me. May listened very attentively whilst I tried to explain to her how very comfortless I was, when God sent her from heaven to be my comfort, and how ever since that time she had been to me what Hugh was, my only joy; and that sooner than part from her I would go to the other end of the world.

“Poor Hugh! Poor mothie!” said May, showering her soft kisses all over my face. “When I am grown up I never mean to marry, mothie. I mean always to live with you—always—always—till you are an old woman with white hair and a wrinkled face, and *quite blind*—and then I shall lead you about so carefully, and tell you everything I see, till you will be quite glad you are blind, I shall talk so much to you.”

I laughed at the cheerful prospect of complete darkness and eternal chatter; but I shuddered whilst I laughed at the promise my innocent child made, and which I knew she would never fulfil. Ten years of that blessed little life had flown—what might not ten more bring me? Solitude and bereavement again. Oh! if my poor Hugh had but lived to be my never failing prop and comfort.”

Although May had capped my solemn story with so childish a remark as to make me laugh, yet what I had told her sank very deep into her heart, and she never forgot it. The knowledge of my devotion to her unknown father strengthened her love for me, and in after years she often alluded to it. One day, some months subsequent to her entering the convent school, she startled me by the question :

“Mothie! shall you ever have another husband?”

“My darling, *no* ! What on earth made you think of such a thing ? ”

“Because Emma Hayes’ mother has, and so has Aimée de Monceau’s. Emma doesn’t care about it much, but Aimée hates her new papa ; and so should I, I’m sure.”

“Don’t you be afraid, you little goose. Your mother loved your father too well ever to replace him.”

“Are you *sure*, mothie ? ”

“Quite sure, my darling ! Fancy my being married again. Why, I should be ashamed of myself to think of it ! Besides, I’m growing quite an old woman, May.”


“Oh, mothie ! when you were only twenty-six last birthday ! The girls think you look so young, too. They thought you were my elder sister when they first saw you. And Père Breville said yesterday he shouldn’t have taken you for more than twenty ! ”

I laughed and blushed. The child’s


words were not entirely unpleasant to me, for, though I scorned the idea of marrying again, I rather liked to be thought very youthful to have a daughter whose head was higher than my shoulder. But I told May it was all silly talk, and the girls had much better mind their lessons than make surmises as to my probable age.

“And Père Breville, too!” said my child saucily.


Our first separation had been a sore trial to me. I had taken her to the convent myself, resolved to be brave and sensible and to part with her without any fuss, and had passed through the ordeal praiseworthily. May had been much excited at the prospect of her new life, and Mère Anastase had hurried her off to the schoolroom as speedily as possible, so that, beyond a few hasty tears, there had been no time for lamentation, and, as I wiped them away and turned homewards, I had



congratulated myself upon getting over it well. But I had not calculated on the desolation of my rooms without her. When dinner, and tea, and bed time came without a sight of my darling or a sound of her merry voice, and I considered that I must pass four more days in the same way before I saw her again, my grief was extravagant, and I thought that I could never bear it. I was so strange in Brussels at that time : I had no friends, and scarcely any knowledge of the language ; so that the town afforded little distraction from my loss. My only consolation was to walk up and down outside the high grey walls of the convent and try to fancy what my darling was doing inside of them, to listen for the chapel bell, that told me morning and evening she was at prayers, and to devise all sorts of little surprises to await her return on Saturday. Oh ! that first Saturday, when I woke trembling with eagerness to remember I should see



her ; when I presented myself at least half an hour too soon for admittance at the convent, and had to wait in the parlour whilst May was finishing her lessons ; when the tears rushed to my eyes as I heard her voice in the corridor, and overflowed as I laughed and cried at the same time to hold my own child in my arms once more. How we danced home together in the sunshine, I as merry as she, and feeling almost as young ; and how we clung to each other for the remainder of the day and sank to sleep in the same bed, perfectly happy and content ! Then came a peaceful Sunday, to be followed by black Monday, and a renewal of the tears and fears, to be alleviated only by the knowledge that, as sure as the earth revolved upon its axis, Saturday must come round again. But a few weeks cured me of that folly. May grew interested in her classes and companions ; she made rapid progress, and I became fond of her success and



anxious nothing should hinder it; and, on my own part, I gained several friends, both English and foreign, familiarised myself with the French language, and found that everything round me teemed with matter for fresh fancy and new ideas. I grew to love Brussels and all that was in it. It was the first home of my own that I had ever had, and after a year's residence there I felt as though May and I belonged to the town. When, at the end of a twelvemonth, I visited the Delanceys with my daughter, Juliet was quite as much astonished at my mental development as she was at May's physical growth.

"I should never have known you again, Katie," she cried. "How independent you have grown! Why, what have you been doing to yourself, my dear? You are quite a different creature from what you were."

"Altered for the better, I hope," I said, laughing.

"Immensely, outwardly as well as inwardly ; though I never thought your dear little face wanted improvement. But the style in which you dress your hair suits you admirably. And what a colour you have ! And I believe you've grown taller. Katie, you are looking quite beautiful !"

"Oh ! please don't talk like that, or you will compel me to blush," I answered gaily. "But what do you think of my May, Juliet ? Isn't she growing lovely ?"

"She's a very fine girl, but she'll never have half your grace," said my sister-in-law bluntly. "Well, Brussels seems to agree with you both, and I'm very glad you consented to go there."

Lady Power approved quite as much of the alteration which a year's absence had made in both of us, as her daughter did, and from that time there appeared to be no question that May's education should be carried on and finished in Brussels. For our own

parts, we were delighted to find ourselves once more established under the shadow of the Convent of L'Enfant Jésus; and for five years from that period, with the exception of a periodical visit to England or Ireland, Brussels was our happy home. But I do not intend to pass all those years by in one hurried sentence; though three of them may easily be disposed of—three years, during which May grew to a tall, womanly girl of fourteen, very forward for her age and very accomplished, though still retaining much of her childish fun and wilfulness, and, more than all, her love for myself. Three years, during which I had been slowly but surely coming to the conviction that, whatever others might think it wise and right to do, for *me* there was but one religion on earth, and that was the religion of my child, and the end of which found me a Catholic and happier than I had ever been in my life before.

Three years, during which my own child and I lived and loved together—during which there was no sound of coming storm or war—which sped by so peacefully and happily that I, at least, with former experience to go upon, might have known they could not last.

But how much have we to be thankful for in those quiet times that give us strength to bear the coming battle and brace our nerves for the sight of rapine and carnage. There was but one thought at that period that had power to make my pulse beat quicker—and that was the decision at which Lady Power had arrived, that at sixteen May should leave school and return to Dublin to be presented at the Viceregal Court and formally introduced into society.

“Sixteen!” I exclaimed, aghast at the idea of having to leave Brussels and go back to live in Ireland. “It is terribly young! Why, she will be little more than a child.”


"You were not quite sixteen when she was born," observed my mother-in-law drily on that occasion.

"No; but it was very absurd. And then I think I looked older than May will at that age."

Juliet, who was present, laughed at the idea.

"Don't flatter yourself, Katie; you would have put to shame many a well-grown girl of twelve. Why, May would make now twice what her mother was then, and she is growing every day. She will be a perfect woman in a couple of years."

"Besides," added Lady Power, "my health is not what it was, Katharine, and it is doubtful whether I shall last many years longer. I should like to see Frances introduced to society, and to know she had the weight of my name—and, if possible, my presence on the occasion—so the sooner it is done, my dear, the better. And,



after all, two years is a long time to look forward to. Who knows what may happen in two years?"

Ah! who indeed?

I was silent, and made no further objection. It was of no use fretting over what might never come to pass.

And the last two years had certainly made a great alteration in Lady Power's health. She had grown feeble and inactive. All the old people seemed passing away. I was in mourning at that very moment for poor Aunt Tessie; and my father-in-law was gone; and now, I supposed, Lady Power would be the next!


And I sighed—not so much for them, as for the thought of that grave in Père-la-Chaise, to which the mere mention of sickness or death always had the power to speed my memory, and for the brave young life which ought to have outlasted theirs, but which was laid down to sleep in it so early.

CHAPTER XIX.

A NEW FRIEND.

AMONGST the kindest friends that I had made in Brussels was the British Consul, whom I shall call Mr. Chester. He had been an old acquaintance of my father, Captain Arundel—had served with him, I think, in India—and having called on me and discovered who I was, never failed to pay me the most unremitting kindness and attention. It was at his house that I first entered into society—and very shy and awkward I was upon that occasion; but Mr. Chester introduced me to all the best families in Brussels, and very soon I was as much at home at the Consulate as I was in my own rooms.


I am speaking now of my first year's residence abroad, when I had many scruples about mixing in society at all, and was frightened to hear my own voice in the company of others. Little by little, however, Mr. Chester and his friends persuaded me to overcome my morbid shrinking from publicity, and to accept the innocent pleasures that came in my way, and which I was as fully able to enjoy as any girl amongst them. But one style of entertainment I never mixed in, and that was dancing. I had never learned to dance, which would at once have put it out of the question; but had I done so, I do not think I should ever have gone to a ball. I was quite ready for enjoyment, but I could not forget that I was a widow and a mother; and there seemed to me something so undignified—so completely opposed to a mind that had ever felt sorrow—in dancing, that I would never even yield to my friend's entreaties that I



would go to the public balls, if it were only to look on. I dare say I was ultra-fastidious; and, doubtless, lack of custom had much to do with my feelings—but I am glad now that it was so. I am glad to think that I have never danced with any one, except when I held my baby's hands in the twilight, and capered about the room to the music of her bubbling laughter, when even Hugh might have looked down from heaven upon me, and felt that my mirth was doing him no wrong.

But at the time of which I now write, when May was fourteen years of age, I was constantly going into society — “grown quite dissipated,” as my saucy child used to tell me. But, as a rule, I would never accept an invitation for Saturday evening. That was kept sacred to intercourse with my daughter, whose company was ever to me the most attractive in the world.

Yet, one Saturday—how well I remember



it!—in the middle of January, I was engaged to go to the Consulate. It was the birthday of my old friend's wife, and it had been a long promise that I should be present on the occasion.

"It never struck me to think on what day of the week it would fall," I remarked, quite disconsolately, as I stood before my toilette-glass, arranging myself for the festivity in question.

"Never mind, dear mothie," said May soothingly. "I shall amuse myself very well whilst you're away; and you won't be late."

"Oh, I'm sure not to be late, darling! I shall be only too anxious to get back to you!"

"But you mustn't run away before the evening's half over, mothie, or Mrs. Chester will be hurt. Are you going to wear Aunt Tessie's pearls?" (They were the one thing of value poor Aunt Tessie had had to bequeath to me.)

“Won’t they be too smart, May?”

“Not a bit; and they look so beautiful on your arms and neck! How white and round your arms are, mothie! I shall never have such a skin as yours, Aunt Juliet says. There’s too much pink in my face, and too little brown in my hair for that.”

“What nonsense, darling!” (Nothing vexed me so much as to hear my good points brought forward at the expense of those of my child.) “I never had half your looks, and I never shall.”

“Oh, what a story!” said my tall girl, as she came beside me and hung upon my neck. “You’re the dearest, sweetest, cleverest, prettiest mothie a girl ever had! You’re the prettiest woman in Brussels!—I always say so!”

“May dear, I shall be angry if you talk like that! I don’t like it. It makes me feel as if I must have brought you up all

wrong, to think so much about one's personal appearance."

"But I can't help *seeing*!" cried impudent May. "What were my eyes given me for? And just look at your hands, mothie! They're as white and as soft as satin!"

As she spoke, and I glanced in the mirror at my own reflection, a sudden remembrance struck me of what Hugh had prophesied concerning the skinny little hand on which he had placed the wedding-ring that still glittered there. It was one of those memories that come like a flash of lightning, and seem (for a brief moment) to illuminate the whole past, and recall everything at once.

The tears rushed into my eyes.

"So much the worse, my child!" I said almost pettishly, as I turned away. "There is no one to care now whether they are smooth or rough!"

"Oh, mothie darling!" she exclaimed pathetically, for she *heard* the tears in my voice, "don't *I* care?"

"It cannot make much difference to you, my May."

"It does!—of course it does! Do you suppose I don't like to have a nice young pretty mother, instead of a wrinkled-up old frump with bob-curls, and a face all over pimples?"

She made me laugh.

"I don't know about the curls and the pimples, darling; but I expect I shall soon be an old frump, whether you like it or no. Do you know that I shall be thirty next birthday?"

"And what's that, mothie?—nothing! Emma Hayes is two months younger than I am, and her mother is fifty. Besides, you *ought* to keep yourself young, because of Hugh."

"May, what *do* you mean?"

"Why, mothie, he won't grow older in

heaven, you know ; and when you meet him, don't you think he would rather you were nice and jolly and young, instead of crabbed and old ? ”

“ Oh ! May, don't. I forgot, darling !—I forgot ! ”

But it was such speeches as these that bound me each day nearer to my child. She had grown up so completely one with me ; she had shared my thoughts and feelings so unreservedly, that we were much more like two sisters, in our intercourse with each other, than like a mother and daughter. She always spoke openly of her dead father to me, and with the greatest certainty of our all three being united as one family in the world to come, until space and time would appear to dwindle into nothing, and our meeting with Hugh as a thing of to-morrow. No wonder that I loved to talk with her.

“ Only fancy, mothie,” she would say,

“how surprised Hugh will be when you show me to him ! He won’t believe I’m his child—will he ? He’ll say, ‘ Nonsense ! why she’s twice as big as you are, Katie ? ’ ”

“ But you are very like him, my May. He will recognize you by your face.”


“ I shall know *him*, mothie, I’m sure ; and I shall rush at him and say, ‘ Hugh ! I love you, though I’ve never seen you ! ’ But I expect he won’t look at me whilst you’re there.”

“ My own child ! we belong equally to him. He can never separate you from me in his thoughts, I’m sure.”

“ Do you think he knows I’m born ? ”

“ I hope so ! Oh, I do hope so ! It has been my great comfort to think he sees us both, May.”

“ Then I’m sure he does, mothie ; because God would never let you feel the comfort, unless there was some reason for it. Perhaps he’s in this room now ! ”



“I wish I could believe it.”


“Do believe it, mothie! Perhaps the belief will bring him here! Perhaps he is waiting to hear you speak to him. I wouldn’t be ‘frightened if I were to see him: I should be glad. It seems so strange to have a father, and yet not to be able to see him till you go to heaven!”

It was conversations such as these which grew out of the perfect familiarity existing between May and me, and which made me feel sometimes as if my dear dead boy were really not gone from amongst us, but only hidden by some earthly vapour which needed Death to clear from before our eyes.

But I am wandering from the evening of the Chesters’ dinner-party. I let my child clasp the pearls on my neck and arms, above the black velvet dress I wore; and then, with many an injunction to make herself happy, and many an asseveration that I should be home early, I departed to

the house of my friends. It was a very large gathering, for the Chesters had been resident so long in Brussels that they knew half the town.

I was taken in to dinner by an old French gentleman who was on his way to Paris, and who, finding I had visited that city, drew from me some slight details of the occasion which took me there. Whereupon we got into a most interesting conversation (to me) concerning the cemetery of Père-la-Chaise (to which I had never yet summoned up courage to pay a pilgrimage), and my companion ended by promising me to go there himself on his return home, and send me word of the condition in which he might find my husband's grave, and what it might require in the way of being repaired. I talked so long and earnestly on this subject with my new acquaintance, that I hardly took any notice of the dinner, or the rest of the company; still I could not



help occasionally feeling (in the way that one *does* feel without seeing) that other eyes were on me ; and once or twice, on glancing up, I suddenly encountered the gaze of a gentleman who was seated on the opposite side of the table, divided from me by a large épergne of hot-house flowers. I can see now, as I recall the circumstance, the large dark eyes bent upon me from a face half hidden by crimson geraniums, and white camellias, and green ferns ; and can remember the little start I gave at each encounter, and how quickly my opposite neighbour withdrew his gaze, and turned with some careless question to his next companion. Once I thought that I must have been talking too loud, and lowered my voice in consequence ; but the fear did not trouble me much, nor did I even remember the fact until quite the middle of the evening, when Mr. Chester brought the same gentleman up to introduce to me.

“Lord Eustace Annerley wishes to be presented to you, Mrs. Power,” he said formally; and then hurriedly whispering in my ear, he went on: “Awfully good fellow; son of the Earl of Riversdale; knows your husband’s family; must make great friends with him,” and left me to my fate.

I was not quite such a Goth as I had been, but I was still ridiculously shy with strangers; and as Lord Eustace bowed and stood before me, I felt myself redden up to the roots of my hair, and every topic of conversation quietly slip out of my head.

My companion, however, did not appear to be afflicted with the same complaint. The large dark eyes, I felt, were bent full upon me, although mine were nervously examining the lace on my pocket-handkerchief.

“I have been wishing for the pleasure

of an introduction to you all the evening," he commenced: "I should have asked for one long before, had you not been so surrounded by admirers there did not appear a chance of getting near you."

"Only Monsieur Odot," I began explanatorily.

"Ah! the old French gentleman. I watched you holding a most absorbing conversation with him at dinner. You had no eyes nor ears for any one else; the rest of the world could only look on and envy him."

"We were not speaking of a very enviable subject," I said, with a sigh, "though it interested me. He was telling me about my husband's grave in Père-la-Chaise."

"I beg your pardon," exclaimed Lord Eustace gravely; "I should not have mentioned it so carelessly. I had no idea, of course, of the topic of your conversation. I hope you will forgive me!"

"There is nothing to forgive. It all happened a long time ago. Mr. Chester says you are acquainted with some of my husband's family."

"I knew one member of it—and a fine young fellow he was ; but he died—let me see—oh ! twenty years ago. We were at school together in Ireland. His name was Hugh Power. He was a son of the late Sir Thomas Power, of Gentian's Cross."

"But that was my Hugh !" I exclaimed breathlessly. "It isn't twenty years—it will be only fifteen years next June since he died ! — and it was of his grave I was speaking to Monsieur Odot."

"*Your husband ?* Are you really Hugh Power's widow ? You must forgive my ignorance, Mrs. Power, but though I *did* hear something of it at the time, I really never realised the fact that poor old Hugh was married. He was such a perfect boy !

—and it seems such ages ago since it occurred. Why, we were exactly the same age.”

I looked at him in astonishment. It seemed incredible that Hugh should have been as old as Lord Eustace, had he lived. And yet, of course, he was right. He was a fine-looking man, himself, of six-and-thirty; and dear Hugh had been one-and-twenty when we married.

“Indeed he *was* my husband,” I went on, anxious to convince Lord Eustace of the fact. “We had only been married a few weeks when he died of typhoid fever.”

“But—forgive me for mentioning such a thing—you look so very young, Mrs. Power. I was astonished when I heard you had been married at all.”

“I am six years younger than Hugh,” I answered; “but I have been fifteen years a widow. I have a daughter of fourteen,” I added eagerly.

“Nonsense! I cannot believe it.”

“Ask Mr. Chester, then. And she is so like Hugh, Lord Eustace. You must see her. I am sure you would recognise his features at once.”

“I shall be delighted to have the opportunity of doing so. Still, it appears incredible to me—you with a daughter of fourteen. You must look like sisters.”

“Some people say we do,” I answered with a quiet laugh.

“Fancy your being my old friend Hugh’s wife,” he went on with genuine interest.

“It must have been sympathy that attracted me to you from the first. Did you never hear him speak of Eustace Annerley?”

“I do not remember. He was with the Reverend Mr. Dean at Guildford when I met him. He did not often speak to me of his former schooldays.”

“Ah! we were both very naughty boys, I am sorry to say, and expelled together

from Parnassus House, in Dublin. And so poor old Hugh married at one-and-twenty. What did his parents say to that, Mrs. Power?"

This question paved the way for the discussion of a subject in which I felt quite at home; and Lord Eustace Annerley having taken a seat beside me, I launched out into a long history of my courtship, marriage, and subsequent troubles until, I think, he must have known almost as much about them as I did. He listened very attentively, pulling his long moustaches thoughtfully as he did so; and I had leisure during that conversation to notice what a marvellously handsome man he was, although his beauty made no difference to my feelings respecting him. All I could think of was, that he had known and loved my Hugh.

"You interest me wonderfully, Mrs. Power," he remarked as I brought my

story to a conclusion. "It was a happy chance that brought me to my old friend Chester's this evening. I am only passing through Brussels."

"You do not live here, then?" I said with some disappointment.

"Oh! dear, no. I am supposed to live on my father's estate in Wicklow, but, in reality, I am here, there, and everywhere. It's a great misfortune to be an eldest son, Mrs. Power. My brothers, Jack and Sidney, who have to work for their living, are infinitely happier than I am, who have positively nothing to do "

"You are not married, then?"

"No, thank—I mean, unfortunately, I am not. I suppose I shall have to marry some day, but I have not been able to meet a lady yet who suited me."

"How fastidious you must be!"

"Excuse me, not at all. I see lots of nice girls, but they won't have me."

“Have you ever asked them, Lord Eustace?”

He looked slyly at me. In every line of his face one could read he was not a marrying man—that if he ever did marry, it would be by force rather than inclination.

“Constantly. I’m always being refused; and here I am, at six-and-thirty, a miserable bachelor. I have not been so fortunate as my friend Hugh, you see, Mrs. Power.”

I did not relish his using that name in a jesting manner, and turned the subject.

“I should like you to see my little girl before you leave Brussels.”

“I mean to make a point of seeing your little girl, if you will permit me. On what day may I have the honour of calling upon you?”

Now of late years I had made a rule of always remaining at home on Tuesday afternoons to receive my friends, and my

little *réunions*, given in a country where such gatherings are so much better understood and attended than in England, were quite noted throughout Brussels. Coffee and cakes, a little music—but always *good* music—an opportunity for a little flirting, and a great deal of conversation, were all the inducements my Tuesdays held out to my guests, yet week after week my rooms were filled with the best people in Brussels, and many a day and evening of amusement grew out of the meetings and arrangements those afternoons engendered. May and I tried the same plan once, years afterwards, in Ireland, and found our invitations so coldly responded to that we relinquished the idea in despair: a couple of old maids in muddy boots, who looked in on their way to the town, and the mother of a large family, who hadn't a moment to spare, constituting the average success of our "at homes." But English

people, as a rule, do not know how much they lose by an exhibition of the national "reserve," on which the majority pride themselves, and which, interpreted, simply means a want of sociability and an excess of ill-breeding which prevents their ever thoroughly knowing what it is to enjoy the society of their fellow-creatures.

I would have asked Lord Eustace to make one of my guests on the following Tuesday, but that he had intimated his intention of leaving Brussels beforehand, and that he would not see May there.

I told him so.

"But may I not stay in Brussels if I like?" he replied, with a comical pretence of asking a favour.

"Of course," I stammered; "only I thought—I imagined that you said—"

"That I was only passing through? Exactly. So I was, because I had no in-

ducement to stay longer. But I am my own master, Mrs. Power; and if you will permit me to attend your reception next Tuesday—”

“But you won’t see May,” I interrupted him with. “She only comes home from the convent where she is being educated, on Saturdays and Sundays. And you *must* see May.”

“I *must* see May,” repeated Lord Eustace. “Then that entails my remaining here till next Saturday. Not a very great hardship, Mrs. Power; particularly if you will help me to pass the time pleasantly. Do you skate?”

It was one of the few amusements in which I felt I might join without loss of dignity. Many ladies, much older and more matronly in appearance than myself, skated daily on the lake in the Jardins Zoologiques, and for some winters past, ever since May had been able to skate with

me, I had regularly indulged in this healthy and exciting exercise.

"I do indeed," I answered eagerly, "and so does my little girl. We were on the lake for three hours this afternoon. May wore a Polish costume. She looks so pretty in it. I believe she is considered one of the best skaters here."

"A Polish costume!" repeated Lord Eustace.

"Yes, of dark-blue cloth and fur. By the way, she nearly had an accident, the darling. She was run down by a couple of boys, and would have been thrown right into the water where the ice is broken—so she tells me—had it not been for a gentleman on the bank who stopped her by catching at her pelisse. It has made me so nervous! I shall not be able to let her go out of my sight on the ice again."

"It was I," cried my companion. "I am so glad."

"Was it you who saved her?"

"'Saved' is rather too strong a term to use. It was I who caught at her skirts as she was passing. I was sitting on the bank, strapping one of my skates, when I saw the boys run up against her from behind. And so that was really your daughter! What a curious coincidence! She would have had a nasty ducking, poor child, if she had been pushed into that hole. It should be protected in some way."

"Oh, how can I ever thank you enough!" I exclaimed. "I tried to find the gentleman who had rescued her, but May couldn't point him out. What shall I say to convince you of my gratitude?"

"Simply nothing, Mrs. Power. It was the commonest act possible. I merely put out my hand. But I remember the furred pelisse distinctly, and the long fair hair. She seemed to be a very pretty little girl."

"Oh! she is lovely," I said enthusiastically.

cally. "She is the image of her poor dear father. If I wished you to see her before, Lord Eustace, I wish it doubly now. Could you come in to-morrow afternoon? We generally have a couple of quiet hours on Sunday between the times for going to church."

"I shall be delighted, I'm sure," replied Lord Eustace, and I returned home quite in a glow of gratitude, and full of praises of my new acquaintance.

I found my child sitting up for me, devouring a novel.

"Oh, you naughty May! why weren't you in bed two hours ago?"

"Oh, you naughty mothie! why weren't you home when you said you would be?"

"Am I later than usual, darling?"

"Well, it's one o'clock, ma'am, and you are generally in bed by eleven. Was Mrs. Chester's birthday party more than usually delightful, that it made you forget the time? Who was there?"

Whereupon I launched into a description of the fascinating stranger who had been at school with my Hugh, and felt so powerful an interest in his widow and daughter.

"And only fancy, darling," I concluded, "Lord Eustace is the gentleman who saved you from falling under the ice this afternoon. I could have gone down on my knees to him when I heard it."

"Is he?" said May, in a tone of disappointment; "why, mothie, you said he was handsome!"

"So he is handsome," I responded, with a blush.

"Well, he can't be the same man then that caught me by the skirt to-day. He was quite old and black!"

"Old and black, darling?"

"Well, you know what I mean, mothie. Black hair and eyes and a beard, and as old as—oh! quite as old as Mr. Chester."

"Nonsense, May," I said laughing, but

I was half crying and laughing too. "Lord Eustace is just the same age as your dear father would have been—thirty-six. It is the prime of a man's life, dear."

"Is it, mothie? Well, he looked old to me. And I didn't like him altogether, either."

"That is very ungrateful, May."

"Oh! of course I'm glad he pulled me up in time, only you said he was handsome. Are you coming to bed, mothie? I'm so tired"—she finished with a yawn. And in talking over, with my child, the events of the past week, I almost forgot Lord Eustace Annerley.

But he did not permit us to forget him. True to a minute he presented himself before me the next afternoon. I looked at him as he entered, and could not understand May's evident aversion to his appearance. He was certainly a very handsome man; of medium height and build, his

lithe muscular figure was yet exceedingly graceful in its proportions. His features were good, his large dark eyes, already commented upon, being amongst the most attractive of them.

A drooping moustache and short crisp beard covered the mouth and lower part of the face; but the expression in Lord Eustace's eyes was, when he desired it, so soft and gentle as to make one feel there was no necessity to go farther than those eyes for his character.

He greeted me with some *empressement*, and as if he were an old friend of the family; as, indeed, I almost felt he had a right to consider himself. I had dressed my May with the utmost care: her fair hair, which she still wore loose, flowed over her shoulders; her blue eyes sparkled with mirth and curiosity; her cheeks were tinged with a soft bloom. She looked beautiful, and as I presented her to the notice of Lord Eustace,

I watched his face, and saw with pride the surprise and pleasure which became apparent at the sight of her.

"You are right!" he said addressing me; "she is indeed strikingly like my old friend. So much so, indeed, that—that—"

Lord Eustace did not finish his sentence, but, turning away to the window, seemed by the action to convey the idea that the first view of Hugh's child had been too much for him.

My heart began to beat in sympathy with his. I looked down and my lips trembled.

"Here is Hugh's portrait," said May abruptly, as she detached the photograph I have alluded to before from its place on the wall, and thrust it before Lord Eustace's gaze.

"Stop, May! gently, my child," I said warningly. I feared the pictured likeness of

my husband might have a still greater effect upon the stranger.

“What nonsense, mothie! If he remembers Hugh so well he’ll like to see it;” and without further prefix she placed it in his hands.

“I can trace a similarity of disposition as well as feature in this young lady,” said Lord Eustace a moment after, turning to me and smiling; though I thought he smiled with an effort. “I fancy she has inherited not a little of our dear Hugh’s impetuosity and generous warmth of character—is it not so, Mrs. Power?”

“You judge correctly, Lord Eustace. My child is a little hasty at times, though you may well imagine she is no less dear to me for that. We have so grown up together (if I may use the expression) that we understand each other’s natures perfectly, and are the very best of friends; are we not, dear May?” I ended affectionately.

“We are indeed, dear Katie!” answered that coolest of young ladies, with quite a defiant glance at our new acquaintance; “and never intend to have any friends but each other, do we?”

“I don’t need any other,” I replied, with a faint laugh.

“But I hope the bond, however sacred, admits of a little variation,” said Lord Eustace; “that there is an outside rank of friends into which one may hope to gain admittance.”

“Oh! of course—” I commenced, but May interrupted me.

“No, there isn’t!” she said, almost rudely. “Mothie and I are perfectly happy by ourselves. We don’t want any outsiders, nor any one to interfere between us—do we, mothie?”

“My own child! you quite misunderstand Lord Eustace. He was speaking of our general acquaintances. You are very

fond of Mr. and Mrs. Chester, you know—and the D'Armvilles, and the Bretins, and the Murrays. We should often feel dull if it were not for the kindness of our friends in Brussels.”

“Oh, yes! I don't mind *them*,” she said pointedly. Lord Eustace only seemed amused by her petulance.

“I hope that some day you will include me amongst ‘*them*,’” he said, laughing; “for I should be sorry to remain in your bad graces, Miss May.”

“Pray don't speak like that,” I urged, with real annoyance. “May meant nothing by her thoughtless speech. She would indeed be ungrateful if she did. Letting alone the fact of your having known and appreciated her dear father, the service you rendered her yesterday should ensure her kindly feeling. May, my darling, that reminds me that you have not yet thanked Lord Eustace for having saved you from a very nasty accident.”

"Oh! I'm sure I'm very much obliged to him, mothie."

"I am sure you ought to be, dearest. You might have been drowned, except for his promptitude. The very thought makes me shudder!"

"I should have pulled myself out if I *had* tumbled in," said May, with an affectionate caress.

"I've no doubt you would have proved equal to that occasion, Miss May, as you will to any other that may fall in your way," remarked Lord Eustace. "And may I ask what school you go to?"

This question much offended my child's dignity. Fourteen years old; and to be asked about her school as if she were six!

"I do not go to any school," she replied promptly; "I attend the classes at the Convent de l'Enfant Jésus!"

"Oh, indeed! I beg your pardon. And what do your classes consist of?"

"Everything."

"That leaves a very wide margin."

"Then you must fill it up yourself."

"May darling?" I exclaimed, shocked at her pertness, "do try and answer like a reasonable being."

"Well, mothie, you don't want a list of the week's exercises, do you?"

"I want you to behave like a little lady, dear."

"Miss May is evidently not in a humour for talking this afternoon," said Lord Eustace, with an attempt to turn it off.

"We shall be the best of friends before long, I foresee that; but she is quite right not to bestow her confidence before she knows whether it will be well placed."

Then he directed his conversation entirely to myself, and we were soon again deeply engaged in reminiscences of the past. Six o'clock struck. We had had our coffee; the bells began to ring out for vespers. Still my guest showed no signs of moving.

"It's time for church, mothie!" cried May, *sans cérémonie*, as she flung her book to one side, and left the room to put on her hat and cloak. I half rose. I did not like actually to dismiss Lord Eustace, yet I could not feel justified in neglecting the evening service on his account.

"You must not let me detain you," he said, observing my action.

"May and I are accustomed to attend vespers," I answered apologetically. "We dine early on Sundays. Did you intend—would it be of any use asking you to accompany us, Lord Eustace? We always have a little supper on our return."

"You are very good. I should have been delighted; but I must confess I am not much in the habit of attending church, and—"

"You have been to mass already, I have no doubt."

"I am not a Catholic, Mrs. Power."

“Not a Catholic! I am so sorry,” I stammered.

The news took me quite by surprise. Somehow, on account of his being an Irishman and acquainted with my husband’s family, it had never entered my head to suppose he was a Protestant; and the information gave me pain, though I could hardly have said why.

“Are you so bitter against Protestants, then?” he asked.

“Oh, no! God forbid! Only—I was unprepared for the intelligence. It never struck me but that you were one of us—having been at school with dear Hugh, and all!”

“I hope I haven’t sunk in your estimation because of my confession. I would be a Catholic twenty times over, sooner than do that.”

“You should not speak so carelessly, Lord Eustace. No! what difference can

your faith make? You were Hugh's friend; that is enough to make you mine."

I held out my hand as I spoke; and as he took it, he raised it to his lips. I was living in a country where such an act means little; so I accepted it as courtesy and nothing more. May came in at that moment, ready for church, and there was no time for further conversation. I bade Lord Eustace hastily farewell, and prepared to accompany her to S. Gudule. But I recall, with shame, that I could not help my thoughts wandering several times during the service that followed, to our new acquaintance; and more than once, as the remembrance of his being a Protestant flashed across my mind, I detected myself in giving vent to a heavy sigh. Yet, what concern on earth was it of mine if Lord Eustace Annerley belonged to one faith or another? He was an early friend of my dead husband—that was the only ground on which we had

a pretext for knowing one another. He stood to May and me in that position alone.

He must be our friend according to the love and loyalty he cherished for dear Hugh's memory—nothing less nor more.

CHAPTER XX.

A NEW FEELING.

BUT I could not understand the aversion which my child appeared to have conceived for Lord Eustace. It was without grounds—inexplicable. Her manner during their interview had annoyed me—much more on account of my pride in her, and anxiety that every one should admire her as I did, than any other feeling; and, as we sat at supper together that evening, I reverted to the subject.

“May darling! whatever made you so curt with Lord Eustace this afternoon?”

“I don’t like him, mothie!”

“But why, my child? He had evidently

every desire to make friends with you ; but you spoke quite rudely to him sometimes."

"I don't want to make friends with him."

"That doesn't sound like yourself, May ; you generally behave so nicely in society. And the mere fact of his having been your dear father's friend—"

"Oh ! what does he care about my father, mothie ? He only says it to please you. It's all humbug. If he had really cared so much about Hugh, do you suppose he would have lived fifteen years without discovering he had left a widow and child ?"

That thought had never struck me before. In some things my child was practically more a woman of the world than I was.

"He was a very young man at the time, May, and perhaps he did not care so much ; but as we get on in life, we know better what the loss of a true friend means. Lord

Eustace was certainly affected at the sight of you and the picture."

"He turned away to the window, you mean; that's easy enough to do."

"My darling child! you are terribly prejudiced against the poor man. What on earth can have made you so? What do you see to dislike in him so much?"

"I can't tell you, mothie. He's got evil eyes!"

"May! his eyes are beautiful!"

"Well, that's a difference of opinion, you see. I don't think so. Then he has a horrid way of looking at one—all round the corner."

"One would imagine he squinted?" I said, laughing.

"No; I suppose he's handsome, as faces go. But after all, mothie, what do I know about gentlemen?"

"You're generally polite to them, May."

"In a way, perhaps. But we don't want them bothering here; do we, darling?"

She left her seat, and came to my side as she spoke, kneeling down and laying her dear head on my breast. "We're very happy here together, mothie, and I'm worth all the gentlemen in the world to you—ain't I?"

Her question startled me as if I had been doing something wrong.

"My own child, yes!—who ever thought otherwise? But we must be civil to the outer world occasionally, darling, or we shall get the character of being bears."

"Ah! I don't mind people coming on Tuesdays—that's the day for nuisances; but I don't like having our Sundays cut up. Don't let Lord Eustace come again on Sunday, mothie! That's *our* day—yours and mine."

"He shan't," I said fervently, as I embraced her, and remembered, with a slight pang of self-reproach, that this was the first occasion on which our Sunday

seclusion had been broken in upon by any one.

On Tuesday morning a basket of the most beautiful hothouse flowers, for the decoration of my rooms, was left at our door with Lord Eustace Annerley's compliments.

I considered the attention both kind and flattering, and I told Lord Eustace so when we met in the afternoon.

"It is nothing," he said carelessly; "I am only glad you liked them. But one thing I truly regret, Mrs. Power, and that is the absence of your little girl from the assembly. I see she does not like me; but I am determined to use every means in my power to overcome the feeling."

"Oh! Lord Eustace, I trust you will forgive her childish pertness. I am afraid she has been rather spoilt. She can hardly be aware how rude her manner seems."

"Do you think I could cherish any feelings but those of kindness towards Hugh's

child? Indeed, you don't know me! So bent am I on making friends with Miss May, that I have delayed my departure from Brussels on purpose."

"You are too good!" I murmured.

"Not at all: I do it to please myself. If this frost holds out, I shall be on the ice next Saturday with a peace-offering in my hand, before which I hope even Miss May's coolness will be found to melt."


"I only trust you may meet with all the gratitude your kindness deserves. She is a very dear child, as you will say when you know her."

"I have not the least doubt of it. With such parents, she could not be otherwise than dear. Do you intend to skate before Saturday, Mrs. Power?"

"I hope to be on the ice to-morrow."

I knew when I said this that Lord Eustace meant to meet me there, but I could not conceive that in so public a place, where I

was in the midst of all my acquaintance, there could be any harm in his doing so. On the contrary, I was flattered by the evident desire this man evinced to gain my friendship, and I was anxious to make up to him for May's rudeness by proving I did not share her unreasonable dislike. We saw each other more than once during that week; but I did not tell my child so when we met the following Saturday afternoon, nor was Lord Eustace's name mentioned between us. As soon as May reached home, she changed her dress for skating, and we



parties, except from day to day, with any certainty of carrying them out; but in Holland and Belgium, it is so common to be able to skate the whole winter, that all sorts of amusements are inaugurated upon the ice. In Brussels, especially, there was always something going on; and fairs, concerts, or *fêtes* by torchlight were events of every-day occurrence. The dresses prepared for such occasions also were both fantastic and pretty, so that the surface of the frozen lake at the Jardins Zoologiques often presented a medley of national and fancy costumes.

May delighted in these gatherings, and dire were her lamentations at the first symptom of a thaw. Her practised skating, fanciful dress, and sweet face rendered her an object of attraction to both visitors and residents, and I was never more proud than when I followed in her wake, listening to the complimentary remarks that were made upon her from all sides.

"There's a lovely girl!" some one would observe, as she skimmed past him.

"By Jove, yes! How well she skates, too! Doing the outside edge like a bird! Wonder if she's English."

"Not much doubt of that, man. You never saw a Belgian with such limbs. I should like to know her name."

"What's the use? She's most likely some heavy swell. But she's the prettiest girl I've seen here out and out."

And they never seemed to guess that the little woman in black velvet and sable who hovered about them as they spoke was the mother of the girl they had been admiring. That shows how seldom they can have looked at me, after her. Had they scrutinised my face they must have detected the maternal love and pride that were glowing there.

On the afternoon in question, May, as usual, had flown at least three times round the lake before I had got my skates on.

When I joined her, I found she was talking with Lord Eustace Annerley, and, to my surprise, amicably.

“Look what Lord Eustace has given me, mothie!” she said, as I came up with them; “isn’t it kind?”

She held an open morocco case towards me as she spoke, containing a brooch and earrings set with turquoises. They were not very valuable trinkets, perhaps, but they were just the pretty, showy things that would take a child’s fancy, and May had never had any ornaments of her own before. There were, indeed, certain heavy, valuable, sombre sets of diamonds and emeralds waiting for her coming of age in her Irish home; but she did not even know of their existence, and jewelry of any sort had had no uses for her hitherto. I saw her dear eyes sparkling as she contemplated the pretty blue stones, and an expression, not unlike regret that she had treated the donor

of them with rudeness, already stealing over her countenance.

"Aren't they pretty, mothie—isn't it kind?" she repeated.

"They are beautiful, darling; and it is more than kind of Lord Eustace. Indeed, I think I ought to scold him for spending so much money on a very naughty little girl."

I looked up at Lord Eustace as I spoke, but his eyes met mine in mild reproach.

"Please don't make any unpleasant allusions, Mrs. Power. May and I are going to be great friends henceforth and for ever; indeed, I shouldn't wonder if we ended in a violent flirtation—eh, May?"

"They are lovely," said my child, alluding to the trinkets, and not noticing the question put to her.

"And flowers, too, May? you are a lucky girl," I remarked, seeing that Lord Eustace held a small bouquet in his hand.

"The flowers are for you—if you will

accept them," he said in a low voice, turning to myself.

I laughed—and perhaps I blushed a little with pleasure and surprise—as I fastened the bouquet in the bosom of my dress; but when I looked up again I was startled by the steadfast gaze with which May was regarding me.

"Hold these, mothie," she exclaimed abruptly, as she thrust the case of jewelry in my hand; "I'm going to speak to Jeanne d'Armville. I can't stand still any longer."

And she was off from my side like an arrow from a bow.

"Did she thank you?" I inquired of my companion, though without lifting my eyes.

"I require no thanks, dear Mrs. Power. If you are pleased I am more than repaid."

"I cannot help being gratified by any kindness shown to my child."

"I thought so—therefore, in my small way, I tried to show it. Your friendship is

not to be gained without May's. I see that plainly. Therefore May's friendship must be gained at any risks."

I was flattered at the compliment, but I resented the imputation.

"I hope you do not think my little girl is mercenary?"

"Not at all. But she is a child, and children must be won by appealing to their senses. We, who have lived and suffered, speak to each other through the medium of our spirits. If they hold mutual intercourse, no outward sign is needed of the feeling we bear towards each other. That is what the world calls sympathy, Mrs. Power. But how can you expect a young girl who has never loved or lost to sympathise with those who have? She may feel for them—she cannot feel *with* them."

"You speak as though you had loved and lost, Lord Eustace."

"I have done both, though not in the

sense you mean. I have never truly been what people call 'in love,' Mrs. Power. I am a very lonely man in consequence. I often long for the comfort and rest of a home, and the sight of such happiness as exists between you and your child makes me feel hard and envious."

"It should not have that effect. We are indeed very happy, but such happiness is not unattainable. It may come to you some day, and through the same sources. I hope it may."

"Thank you. But I am not sanguine. I am afraid I have lived too long now to change my habits with impunity. I could not put up with all the airs and graces of a fashionable girl. Matrimony does not always go smoothly at first, Mrs. Power. It takes time to make people go in double harness quietly; and I am too old to care about the fuss of quarrelling and making up again, and relinquishing one's own will

to the will of another. It does not appear worth while to me."

He looked so handsome and lazy and *insouciant* as he said this, I could not help laughing.

"But need marriage necessarily bring quarrelling in its train, Lord Eustace? All girls are not determined to have their own way. I cannot believe that had dear Hugh lived we should ever have had a serious difference."

"Perhaps not. But Hugh, even at twenty, was a thoroughly careless, easy-going, happy-tempered fellow, who would as soon have thought of striking a woman as thwarting her."

"He was the most generous, warm-hearted darling that ever lived," I cried enthusiastically. "No one knows what my Hugh was except myself."

"Exactly so, dear Mrs. Power; and so for the space of four weeks you did not

quarrel. Mind ! I do not mean to say you ever would have done so, but you had not a very severe trial, had you ? ”

“ No ; but had he lived to be eighty, I couldn’t have crossed my Hugh. He was so sweet and sunny.”

“ I know he was, and so I believe are you. Your sunniness would have had a large share in the preservation of domestic peace. My poor friend, had he lived, would have been the most fortunate of men ; perhaps, too fortunate, and that is why he was taken.”

“ Oh ! do you think happiness can spoil our lives ? I think misery does. My life, except for May, has been useless since my darling died.”

“ You speak of your life as though it were ended, when it has but just begun.”

“ I am thirty years old, Lord Eustace.”

“ What is thirty ! You have many years of happiness, I trust, before you yet. You

will begin a new life some day, Mrs. Power. Perhaps a brighter one than you have yet thought possible."

"Nothing could be brighter than the life that is ended."

"But you may be better fitted to enjoy the brightness. Depend upon it, that at fifteen years of age, we have not the capability of enjoying ourselves to the fullest extent."

"I had."

"You thought you had! You will live to be undeceived. I thought, a week ago, that Brussels held nothing to interest me. I am fain to confess already I was in the wrong. Who can tell what the future holds for him? You know the old saying, 'Nothing is certain but death.'"

"Mothie darling, are you going to stand here all day?" exclaimed May, as she skated up to me. "You know how you suffered last time you got chilled upon the

ice. The Chesters are on the other side of the lake; and Jeanne d'Arville wants to know if I can go to tea there on Wednesday. Come and speak to them, mothie. Every one is asking where you are;" and without further parley, May slipped her arm through mine, and with a bow to Lord Eustace Annerley, we skated off together to join her friends. But I could not forget the words he had spoken to me. They rang in my ears for days afterwards.

CHAPTER XXI.

INCONSTANCY.

LORD EUSTACE ANNERLEY fulfilled his intention of returning to Ireland the following week ; but I do not think I was much surprised to see him in Brussels again before the month was out. I believe I should have felt disappointed had he not come back—that I should have felt inclined to second May's assertion, that his professed attachment to my husband's memory was a mere farce—a compliment turned to suit the occasion—and have learnt to despise him—as I have learnt since. But at that time I could have sworn by every word he said. It was delightful to me to know some one

who had been intimate with Hugh in his boyish days. It seemed as though, by Lord Eustace's side, I re-lived the happy, joyous past, and became young again over the recollections he evoked for me. True, that Juliet had often spoken to me of her brother ; but then she was many years older than Hugh. She remembered him as a troublesome boy, but she had never been his companion ; and if she had, she could not, by reason of her sex, have entered into his thoughts and feelings as Lord Eustace Annerley appeared to have done. What tales he used to tell me of their schoolboy days, when Hugh stood so much in awe of his stern-hearted mother, and never looked for indulgence except from his father or his friends—of the rebel acts they committed together, the poaching excursions, the boyish mutinies, the moonlight rambles with girls of ten and twelve !

“ *Such* heroines for love romances ! ” Lord

Eustace would exclaim; "such unfledged nestlings—such verdant, unripe fruit!"

Upon which I would remind him of *my* age when I was married, and sober him into an amendment of the personality.

"My dear Mrs. Power, you might have been twelve or two, for the matter of that; but at no period of your existence could you in anywise have resembled the young ladies of which I speak, one of whom, I believe, was the cheesemonger's daughter, and the other hailed as grandfather the daily postman."

"Well, I will try and not feel jealous of their memory, Lord Eustace," I would answer, laughing. "But it is a terrible revelation to hear that I was not the first."

"Whether you always have been, or always will be, a man's first love, Mrs. Power, it is impossible to say; but I think I can safely guarantee that it is with few men you would not be the last."

“At all events, I was poor Hugh’s last,”
I answered, with a little sigh.

Looking back, how wonderful it seems to me that at any time I could have alluded to the greatest sorrow of my life in such trivial words as these. And yet has Hugh’s death proved to be my greatest sorrow? His love was my greatest joy—for that I can answer. But loss of faith is worse than loss of life, and treachery outweighs bereavement.

Lord Eustace’s intercourse with us continued to increase in intimacy, and my life became very bright by reason of his friendship. He was a man of cultivated mind and a high order of intellect (which poor Hugh had never been); and, since it was the first occasion on which I had had an opportunity of close association with so gifted a companion, I enjoyed it accordingly. The only drawback to my pleasure was my child’s indifference to our friend’s society. May was no longer rude to him; on the con-

trary, they were, to all outward appearances, on amicable terms together ; but she suffered rather than encouraged his endeavours to gain her good-will, and was always inclined to be silent and reserved in his presence.

More than once I mentioned the circumstance to Lord Eustace with regret ; but he laughed at my annoyance, and said he had no desire to see my child's manner toward him altered.

"I am not sure that I do not like May all the better for showing her jealousy of me so openly."

"Her jealousy, Lord Eustace?"

"Certainly. By what other name should I call it? Your little girl is jealous that you should permit me to usurp any of the attention that she imagines belongs exclusively to herself ; and I cannot but accept her perspicacity as a compliment."

"But I have never neglected my darling!" I exclaimed in distress. "I would give up

every friend I have in the world sooner than she should think that."

"Excuse me for saying so, Mrs. Power, but there I think your affection would lead you astray. You have devoted the best years of your life to May—surely she might learn not to grudge you the slight consolation of a friend. Children get very *exigeantes* in such matters, and the more you indulge them, the worse they become."

"I know that ; but if May is a little *exigente*, Lord Eustace, it is but natural. Remember we have been all in all to one another."

"But will you always remain so?"

"I hope we shall. I should be indeed miserable if there were a doubt of it."

"What—when May is married?"

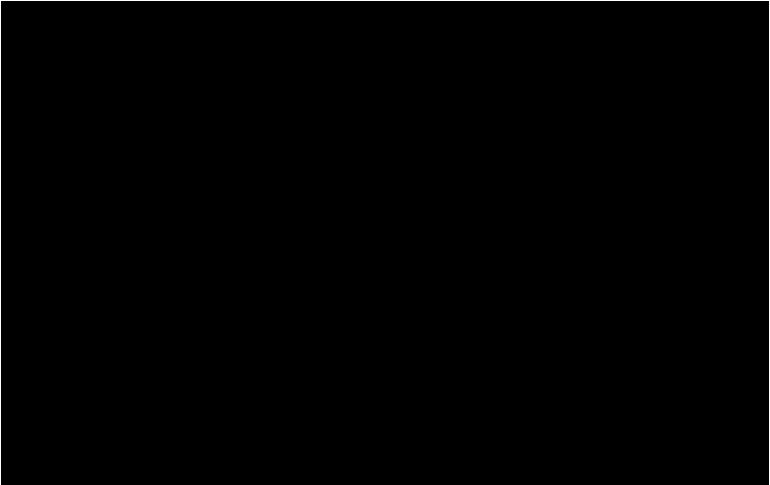
"She may not marry ; but if she does, why should she desert her mother !"

"She will not desert you ; but she cannot live with you, neither will you retain the

chief place in her confidence. It would be wrong to wish it. You yourself will be the first to tell your daughter to confide in her husband, as you confided in Hugh."

"Oh, Lord Eustace! pray don't talk of such things. I know it's all true, but it makes me so miserable."

"I am sorry for that; but it is surely wise to look the inevitable in the face. You cannot prevent it. And then, when May is gone, and her thoughts are filled with her husband and children, what is to become of you?—left to live out the remainder of your



"But I don't mean to discard them," I said softly.

"It will go hard with you, poor child, if you do," he answered in the same tone. "Your heart was made for affection, Katie. Without something to cling to, it would wither and perish; and if you had not had May to lavish your love upon, you would have married again long ago."

"Oh, no!" I began eagerly; but the asseveration died upon my tongue.

"I am very glad you didn't," said Lord Eustace meaningly—too meaningly perhaps he thought, for a second afterwards he added, "because in that case perhaps *monsieur le mari* would have objected to my being your friend and giving you good advice."

"He would have been very silly if he had," I answered, more to conceal my confusion than to make a foolish speech.

"Well, let us be thankful that we have no need to ask his opinion on the subject,"

said Lord Eustace; which enabled me, under cover of a laugh, to turn the subject.

But I could not be quite blind to what was coming, nor remain ignorant of the fact that Lord Eustace Annerley seized every possible occasion to show that he considered me in something more than the light of a friend.

The first revelation with regard to my own feelings came to me in a letter from my sister-in-law, Mrs. Delancey. I had, of course, spoken of Lord Eustace in my letters home; indeed, in the beginning of our intimacy I had almost transcribed the conversations we had together, and taken no pains to conceal that our friendship progressed favourably; but I had known him for more than twelve months before Juliet wrote thus to me:—

“Your description of the beautiful presents Lord Eustace Annerley gave May on New Year’s Day made my little daughter’s mouth

water. What an agreeable person he seems to be. What a pity he is not a Catholic ! I suppose, under the circumstances, mamma would not like the marriage. But you must be aware, Katie, that he would prove an excellent match for May. If he lives he must come into the title, and his estates are situated in the best part of Ireland. He hasn't much money, it is true, but then she will have plenty, and so that would not signify. And the child is getting on—you mustn't forget that. She will be sixteen—will she not—on her next birthday ? Does she seem at all taken with him ? I conclude he must be so with her, else why these attentions ? They can hardly be laid entirely on the score of friendship. I hope Lord Eustace may be all you think him, for the dear child's sake."

The letter dropped from my hands, leaving me almost powerless to think or feel.

Was it—*could* it be true that Eustace's at-

tentions were really due to *May*—that he regarded my child as if she were a woman—that he liked me only because I was her mother? Even in my anxiety to know the truth I did not realise my true feelings respecting him. I believed that I was solely actuated by interest in the future welfare of my child. I did not think I could be mistaken, but I *might* be; and I expended all my energy in inventing means by which the truth might be ascertained without a betrayal of my motive in seeking it. The opportunity came soon enough. It was a beautiful summer evening, and we were all attending one of the open-air concerts in the park; *May*—her arms linked in those of two of her bosom friends—was flitting through the lamp-lit paths, an incarnation of youth, and health, and merriment.

“How the child grows,” said Lord Eustace as she ran across our path.

“She does indeed. One can hardly call

her a child now. She was fifteen on her last birthday."

"Fifteen! What is fifteen? An infant. And, notwithstanding her rapid growth, I think May is rather childish for her age."

"She has lived so much alone with me," I pleaded. "Yet many girls are married at fifteen."

"*You* were, Mrs. Power; but I think it is the exception rather than the rule. And I, for one—saving your presence—do not envy the taste of the man who breaks through it."

"Why, I flattered myself you rather admired my May," I replied, with a nervous laugh.

"Admire her! So I do. I admire that fat baby in the perambulator also, but I have no ambition to become his proprietor, if that is what you mean; though I like children in their proper place."

"Now I won't have my May compared to

that red-faced baby, Lord Eustace," I replied, secretly flattered. "Whatever *you* may think, she is fast approaching womanhood, and if—if—I know that if—"

"If—what?"

"If any one—any man, like yourself, for instance, were to admire her a great deal, or seem to pay her unusual attention, I should—"

"You would ask him his intentions. Brava! Mrs. Power. Why, you're developing into a regular dragon. But has any one presumed?"

"Oh! no. Only you talk as if she were such a baby, and yet you say you admire her. And I know people think—"

"What do they think?"

"That you like May," I answered, breaking off in the most feeble manner possible, and wishing earnestly I had never begun.

"Oh!" said Lord Eustace; and for a moment he said nothing more. Then he added, "And what do you think?"

“Oh! nothing—nothing, of course.”

“*Nothing?* What an empty little head yours must be. You never think—*par exemple*—that, though I admire her very much and love her a little, hers is for me but a reflected glory.”

I was silent.

“You never think that all my thoughts are devoted to and all my wishes concentrated in another person—not so very far from May or me at the present moment, and that I should have a very particular objection, in consequence, to your bringing that visionary admirer of May’s to the point in the strong-minded manner you threatened just now.”

“But why?” I inquired, laughing, glad of an opportunity to change the subject, though my heart was bounding in my bosom at the implication I could not pretend to overlook. “Why shouldn’t my dear, sweet May

be married, when you say it would make no earthly difference to you ? ”

“ Oh ! excuse me ; I never said that. It would make a great deal of difference. Do you want to see me a grandfather before my time ? ”

I had not had a moment in which to reply to his words—to find fault with them, or to pretend to misunderstand them—when May came dancing up to us alone.

“ They’ve gone home,” she said, alluding to her friends ; “ and they want us to follow them, and have supper there. Will you come, mothie ? ”

I clung to her arm tightly. I was trembling with a new, delicious joy. I would have given worlds to be able to go to my own home and ruminate in quiet over the discovery I had just made ; but I was excited and agitated, and I hardly knew what I wanted, or what would be best to do.

“ Oh ! yes, dear, of course,” I answered,

"if you wish to go. Are you happy, May? Have you been enjoying yourself, my own child?"

"Very much, mothie. Did you hear that last song? It was charming. But how you are shivering! Are you cold?"

"Not cold, dearest, only a little tired; but I am very, very happy," I added in a whisper. I felt as if I could not keep my happiness a secret from her even for a moment.

"You have been standing too long," said Lord Eustace, in a low voice. "Take my arm, *Katie*."

He drew my hand through his arm as he spoke, and pressed it firmly with a sense of proprietorship that thrilled me with pleasure. So he walked to the house of May's young friends, and there we parted, without further comment, but with a perfect understanding.

How long the next two hours seemed to me! How tedious the supper meal! how

mawkish and uninteresting the general conversation!

“You’re not well, mothie darling,” said May, as we walked home together “You did not seem to be listening to anything that was said to you this evening; and now I feel your hands they are very hot. Have you a headache? What is the matter?”

“Nothing is the matter, my child,” I answered, “excepting that I am tired, and want to get to bed and to sleep.”

But notwithstanding my expressed anxiety, I sat up for hours after May was slumbering, thinking over the wonderful revelation that had been made to me—not by Lord Eustace, but by my own heart.

He loved me. I had suspected it for some time past, and there was no doubt of it now! but what seemed far more marvellous to me was, that *I loved him*.

And when I had once made the discovery, oh! how very much I felt I loved him!

The first feeling with which this truth overwhelmed me was that of shame. I had broken my troth with Hugh!

For a few moments the thought of dear dead Hugh, mouldering in his coffin in Père la Chaise, made me shrink and tremble; and I was ready to appeal to him for forgiveness that I should have dreamed of permitting another man to fill his place, and be a father to his child. But there is no such cunning sophistry as that of love. The memory of Hugh was sixteen years old; and the echo of Lord Eustace's words had hardly died away. So I thought and thought, until I persuaded myself that Hugh would have been the first to rejoice that his child and widow should find a protector in his dear old friend, and that he could never wish me to pass through life unloved and lonely.

"I am still young," I argued with myself; I was only thirty-one last May, and Eustace says he does not care even to talk to a woman

who is under thirty ; and I have lived a very lonely, colourless life till now. When I look back I can hardly understand how I *can* have lived so many years with only a child's company to cheer me. And May may marry any day. In fact, she *will* marry—there is no doubt of it—as soon as she is introduced into society ; and then what am *I* to do—left all by myself, widowed and childless ? ”

Here the idea of losing my May, even amidst all the advantages of a life with Eustace Annerley, brought the tears to my eyes ; but I brushed them away. “ I won't be foolish,” I said resolutely, “ and cry for what may never come to pass. And if it does—I shall have Eustace ! ”

The thought of “ Eustace ” was already beginning to have power to swallow up the lesser feelings. Love is such a tyrant that when it is actively working in the spirit, its light quenches all other. It *will* be heard and seen and felt. Troubles may not

vanish before its presence, but they dull and dwindle ; and it holds a panacea for all. The light of love was kindled in my bosom now—for the first time as a woman feels it—and I turned faint and sick with the weight of happiness laid upon me, and almost delirious at the thought of what the future would bring. I, who had believed my life was ended, who had believed I could never know the sensation of joy again—the delight of being loved—I had a lover—was to have a husband—to pass once more through all the intoxicating pleasures of a young married life—to be courted and envied and *fêted*—the centre of attraction—the one person in the world for Eustace, his friend and confidante and wife !

“The one person in the world for Eustace.” These words recalled me to myself. What, then, was to become of May ? What part was Hugh’s child to bear in this contemplated companionship ?

Even at that moment my heart cried out against the idea of separation, even in thought, from my darling. If the new arrangement—and though Lord Eustace had not actually spoken the words which were to bind me to himself, I divined so well his intentions respecting me, there was no need to wait for them—if the new arrangement was in any way to interfere in my intercourse with my child, it must never come to pass. Above and beyond all other things was to be considered—May.

I might be able to break my heart in silence, to go back to the old simple round of duty, which looked so dull beside the brilliant picture my lover's words conjured up before me ; but I would not separate from my daughter. That fact was fixed from the beginning, and irrevocably. But I asked myself, Why should I ? No one could be kinder to May than Eustace. No one admired the child, in a childish way,

more than he did, nor was so anxious to minister to her pleasure or comply with her wishes. He had often told me that in another year or two she would be one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen. And surely it would be an advantage to her—dear, darling child!—to secure a constant protector and friend in her stepfather—some one to battle for her through life against herself and others—some one to love and comfort her, if I should be called away.

As with the rapidity of a vivid imagination I instantly pictured myself an interesting corpse, with Eustace and May sobbing over me, I wondered how I could have ever contemplated running the risk of leaving my sweet girl to the tender mercies of her stiff old grandmother and prim maiden aunts, and felt as though I ought not to lose an hour in providing her with so charming a legal protector as Lord Eustace Annerley.

I can write lightly of these things now ; but I did not think lightly of them then.

The next subject to be considered was May's own feeling in the matter, and this I determined to ascertain as speedily as possible. I was pleased to remember that Lord Eustace was spending a few days in Paris. We were so intimate, and our mutual understanding was so evident, that he was not likely to broach the proposal, which had been trembling on his tongue when we parted, by letter, but would speak of it when we met again. Meanwhile I should have prepared my dear child's mind for what would doubtless prove a surprise, but, I felt sure, a pleasant surprise to her, and be able to tell Lord Eustace, when he put the question plainly to me, that my own child—*our* child !—would be as ready to welcome him as a father as I was as a husband.

! lovely dreams, like those induced by

the pleasant poison that first intoxicates and then destroys us! Why must we suffer so much in this world for being a little happy? Why were we ever born, or thrown together, to make each other so wonderfully miserable!

CHAPTER XXII.

REPENTANCE.

It must have been early morning before I crept into bed by my daughter's side. Even then I could not sleep, but lay, silent and happy, conning over and over again the words in which I should divulge the truth to her, devising plans by which to bring the subject easily about, and picturing to myself first her surprise, and then the perfect peace into which my assurances of maternal love would soothe her. I grew quite cunning in those waking hours, forming little plots by which to beguile May into putting some question that should render my task less difficult, and even

anticipated the possibility of cheating her into asking me, for *her* sake, to yield to the solicitations of our best friend.

The morning found me pale and anxious, but very hopeful. May found out that I had not slept well, and tried to persuade me to remain in bed ; but I was too excited and eager to attain my end to feel otherwise than restless. My child was now my constant companion. She had left off attending the convent, except for one or two special classes, and usually accompanied me wherever I went. The occasion I had been trying to make occurred almost naturally before breakfast was over, at which time May sprung to her feet and rushed to the window.

“ Carriages, mothie dear. Why, a wedding, I do declare ! Do you know who is going to be married this morning, Célestine ? ” she continued, addressing a servant who was in the room.

"Madame Fradelle, to some English gentleman," replied the maid.

"Madame Fradelle! What! the little stumpy woman who keeps the girls' school? Well, some people have strange tastes."

"One of the marriages you don't approve of—eh, May?" I inquired nervously.

"Why should'nt I approve, mothie? If the English gentleman, whoever he may be, likes a little stumpy woman, what concern is it of mine?"

"But she is a widow, you know, my dear. Second marriages are what you are always so bitter against."

May turned sharp round from the window, and looked me full in the face.

"But she hasn't any children, mothie."

"What difference should that make, dear? If Madame Fradelle had some poor little fatherless children, there would be all the more reason for her to think of them and their comfort."

“ It would be a strange way of comforting the children, to give them a stepfather,” said May shortly..

“ What!—to work for them, and love them, and protect them, May ? ”

“ I don’t think stepfathers often love their stepchildren. They seem much more likely to consider them in the way. Emma Hayes’ mother’s husband, Mr. Rolston, is horrible. He doesn’t like the children even to be in the room ; and if their mamma tells them they may do a thing, he says directly that they shan’t. Emma hates him more every day.”

“ But, my darling, Mr. Rolston must be an exception to the rule. There are bad and unpleasant people in every condition of life. You must not judge all stepfathers by him.”

“ Well, it can’t make any difference to me, so I don’t care what they’re like,” replied my daughter indifferently ; but she

did not appear to forget the conversation, the subject of which cropped up continually during the next few hours, keeping me in constant torture.

I sighed heavily ; and, for the present, said no more. It was not a very promising beginning. The old prejudice, of which I had heard so little during the last twelve-month that I had hoped it was forgotten, was apparently in full force. And, added to it, May seemed to have grown suspicious. During all that day she kept on alluding to Emma Hayes' stepfather and Madame Fradelle's folly, until she goaded me into replying. With the strain on my mind, occasioned by the knowledge of my secret hope, it was difficult to listen to my child's remarks and be silent. I felt as though I must ascertain the worst at once, or die. So, as she was animadverting strongly on the uncomfortable position of Emma Hayes and the anxiety she displayed to leave home,

I said, with a violent effort at cheerfulness :

“It’s a pity in that case that your friend doesn’t marry. Since she so greatly disapproves of her mother’s choice, she might be happier in a choice of her own.”

“No one has asked her,” replied May bluntly.

“Indeed! I am surprised to hear that, such a pretty girl as she is, and her step-father holding so good a position in Brussels. What is her age?”

“She is nearly twenty.”

“Then it’ll come soon enough, no doubt. The young men of Brussels would not show such bad taste as to leave so good-looking a girl in the lurch.”

“But where are the young men?” asked May, with a smile.

She had reason in putting the question. Brussels is a very charming city to visit—some find it very pleasant to live in—but

for English girls it is not a marrying place. There are scarcely any Englishmen there. Such as are met occasionally are but birds of passage, with neither the thought, the opportunity, nor the means to take to themselves wives. I knew that well enough, of course, but I had had an object in introducing the subject, and I thought that I had gained it.

"I see plenty wherever I go," I answered.

"Only Belgians; and Emma wouldn't marry a foreigner for anything."

"Mr. Welham is an Englishman."

"I know he is, and sixty years of age into the bargain."

"There's young Locock!"

"Eighteen last birthday, and a clerk in a counting-house. No, mothie; I don't think Emma would thank you for him."

"Well, what would she think of Lord Eustace. He is English, and well off, and

not bad looking. Wouldn't he suit Miss Hayes' taste?"

"Lord Eustace!" exclaimed May.

"Yes, Lord Eustace," I returned, with a nervous laugh; "what is there to object to in him?"

"I don't know what there is to object to, but I hope to goodness Emma would never think of marrying *him*," said May determinately.

"I don't suppose he is likely to ask her," I replied; "but why you should object to her making an excellent match I can't imagine."

"Because I love her, mothie. She was my best friend at the convent."

"And so you would like to prevent her making a most enviable marriage?"

"*Enviable*, mothie? Why, you have always preached so much to me against marrying for wealth or position!"

"And has Lord Eustace Annerley no other attractions, then?"

"Oh! he's well enough, I suppose; and I acknowledge he's very kind in giving away presents and paying compliments, and all that sort of thing. But I wouldn't have Emma marry him for all the world."

"Oh, May, you are too hard!" I cried, battling fiercely against a disposition to burst into tears. "When you have lived a little longer you will learn how to appreciate the spontaneous kindness of a friend."

"I don't say anything against him as a *friend*, mothie," replied May pointedly; "but you spoke of Emma marrying him."

"Well, and if she *did* marry him she might consider herself uncommonly lucky," I said, with some amount of temper; "but it's not in the slightest degree likely that he will ever so far honour her as to give her the chance."

"And a good thing for her that it's not likely," returned May; "she might be silly enough to take him."

This was too much for me. I could stand it no longer. I should have betrayed myself had I remained in the room another moment, so I rose and left it.

Sitting by myself, I wondered how it could be that Eustace failed to attract my child's fancy. To my eyes he appeared, in every way, so lovable. He was a perfect gentleman—a thorough courtier—a man whom I believed incapable of behaving otherwise than kindly and well to any creature less powerful than himself—before all to a child and woman thrown upon his protection. His honour and position in society were unassailable. He was a man to be proud of—to be proud of belonging to. Why was May's heart alone closed to all this? Was it a real and permanent dislike to Lord Eustace that actuated her remarks upon the subject? or was it but a frivolous fancy, begot of some childish affront, mixed up with childish jealousy?

I felt that it behoved me to ascertain, and before Eustace should return from Paris. I hoped against hope that a few plain words might dissipate the cloud which hung between my child and me upon this subject; but if they did not—if I should find that her ill-feeling for him was too deeply rooted for any persuasion of mine to cure, I felt there was but one course open to me.

I had been faithless to Hugh, but I would not be faithless to his child. If, by any act of mine, I caused even a shadow to flit across our happy home, or set my daughter's thoughts upon the possibility of escaping from it, I should never forgive myself; and, what was to me of infinitely more importance, I felt sure that Hugh would never forgive me—that we should meet in the vast shades of eternity, not with glad recognition and unclouded hearts, but for me an averted countenance, and for him the stern question: "How have you fulfilled the sacred trust I left you?"

Even in that moment, when my poor heart was fluttering at the idea of possible delight and sinking beneath the prospect of probable disappointment, I thank God that I still thought more of May than of Eustace—more of my dead Hugh than of either of them. I felt very downcast and subdued for the remainder of the day, and when the evening came I refused to take my customary walk in the public gardens. May would not leave the house without me, but sat on a stool at my feet (her favourite position) with her head resting against my knee. I had been making up my mind to broach the subject again on which we disagreed, and go to the point boldly. So that when I spoke, it was without preface, though with an effort.

“May darling, I want to talk to you seriously. Tell me the truth. Why do you dislike Lord Eustace Annerley?”

“I don’t dislike him, mothie.”

“My dear, that is an evasion. You *do*

dislike him—there is no doubt of that, from the animus you display whenever his good qualities are mentioned.”

“I don’t like to hear you praise him, if that’s what you mean.”

“But why not?”

“Well, it’s not pleasant for a girl who’s been always with her mother to have a man come and stick himself up as chief friend, and then for you to have no eyes or ears for any one else when he’s in the room. It’s enough to make one hate him. I dare say he’s well enough, and I shouldn’t mind if he was like other people; but why should he come here every day in the week, and walk in and out of the house like a tame cat?”

She spoke jerkily, and rather unwillingly, as if the truth were being forced from her and she was uncertain how I should receive it; but I understood what she meant. Her sentences were clumsy, her grammar questionable; but I knew that my child had an

inkling of the impending state of affairs, and was fighting with the unwelcome conviction.

She was jealous of my affection. I had let my darling see how engrossed I was with this man's attentions, and think herself neglected in consequence. Oh, how ashamed I felt before her! How anxious I was to disabuse her mind of the idea—to make her believe she had been mistaken.

“My own child!” I exclaimed, with crimson cheeks, “how can you talk such nonsense? Lord Eustace is very kind to both of us, and you know the reason why. It is on account of his old friendship for your father. But had he thought he was intruding, I am sure he would never come here so often. He sees we are two idle, lonely women, and he visits us with the view of enlivening our solitude.”

“Does he stay in Brussels for our sakes also?” inquired May. “His family live in Wicklow, don't they?”

“I believe so; but Lord Eustace has always lived more or less abroad. Any way, we have no right to question his actions. But I cannot see how his intimacy here affects you, May, or your feeling for him. He has always been exceedingly kind to you, and even if you do not care for him, I don’t see why you should dislike him.”

My child sighed, more deeply, I think, than I had ever heard her sigh before.

“How am I to explain it to you, mothie? I see that Lord Eustace is gentlemanly, and polite and amiable, but I don’t trust him; I don’t think he is earnest or true. He is full of talk and palaver; and I dare say he likes us well enough—why should he not? you have been kindness itself to him—but there is a look in his eyes that I can’t get over—and—and *I do wish he wasn’t such a friend of yours, dear mothie!*”

She pressed her cheek against my knee as she spoke, and looked up into my face with

such sweet beseeching eyes, that I felt every hope I had cherished flutter, like wounded birds, upon the ground—and die. And yet I could not hear her speak of him so without saying one word in his defence.

“May, my darling, you are utterly mistaken. You are very young, remember, and have not had the same opportunities of reading character that I have. I assure you Lord Eustace is true and open as the day. He may not speak so unreservedly as many of your acquaintances—he is no longer a young man, and has learned, probably, to keep his opinions in general to himself; but he is very clever and intellectual, and perfectly polished. As for his personal appearance, that is of course a matter of taste; but to imagine there is anything sinister in the look of his eyes is absurd—utterly absurd—and only a child would have made so foolish a remark. His eyes are beautiful—splendid! They are the most striking feature he possesses.”

I paused for a reply, but May made none. I placed my hand lovingly upon her head, and smoothed her hair as I went on again.

“It is cruel to judge a friend’s character from his outward appearance, May. If so good-looking a man as Lord Eustace cannot escape your criticism, how would a poor cripple fare at your hands? And Lord Eustace possesses what is immeasurably above beauty in value: a cultivated mind and noble birth. He is a friend to look up to and be proud of. There are few women who would not be inclined to envy you the possession of him even as a friend, whilst in the position of a nearer and dearer companion, he—”


“Mother!” cried May suddenly, as she started up and confronted me. “Mother darling! oh, don’t say that you want *me* to marry him!”

The entreaty was so abrupt, the climax she had reached so puzzling, that, under

any circumstances, I should have found it difficult to answer her. But, beneath her surprise and curiosity and alarm, I perceived so evidently the deeper feeling—that of dislike and enmity—that my heart sickened at the task imposed on me, and the certainty which the future was assuming.

“My own child, you frighten me by your energy. No! No! of course not! Is it likely I should wish you to marry a person you are averse to—that I should ever wish you to marry at all? If the opportunity comes, my darling, with the prospect of making you happier than you are with me, well and good; but I could never bring myself willingly to contemplate our separation; far less to try and bring it about before the time.”

“That’s all right, then,” commenced May, resuming her old position; “for I never *will* leave you, darling! It would break my heart. As it would to know that any one



came between us," she added in a lower tone.

"No one can ever do that, May. We are *one*—one heart and one mind—for time and eternity. But to love another person does not necessarily infer a breach of loyalty to our first friends. If you fall in love (as I dare say you will some day, notwithstanding your protestations to the contrary), I shall not be jealous. I shall be very glad to know my child has an additional source of happiness, and I shall pray God to preserve it to her. And so with yourself. You would not be so selfish as to wish me to give up all my friends because I possess your affection. You will always be the very first consideration in the world to me ; but I can still enjoy the pleasure of friendship. Do you understand me?"

"Oh! I don't mind *friends*," said May irrelevantly.

"Then you will try to feel more kindly

towards Lord Eustace Annerley. For *my* sake—will you, May?”

She did not answer, and I repeated in a coaxing voice.

“You will try to love him for my sake, won’t you, darling?”

But to my consternation I found that she was in tears.

“My own child! what is the matter?”

“Oh, mother, mother!” she exclaimed between her sobs, “I will be friendly with him or any one you like, only—don’t—*don’t* love them better than you do me, mother! for I couldn’t bear it. It would break my heart!”

“May, May! how can you think I would?”

“Don’t let them come between us, mother! Don’t let them be always in the house, and insisting upon going with us everywhere. Let us be sometimes alone,

mother darling, as we used to be long ago before—we knew—any of them.”

She spoke in the plural number, but my guilty conscience told me too well her words pointed to but one, and that one Lord Eustace Annerley.

“Why, what a jealous little toad it is!” I said, trying to laugh away her despondent mood. “Whatever would you have done if your mother had gone and married again, as ninety-nine women in a hundred left in her position would have done?”

“I would have *hated* him!” replied May, with fixed teeth. “I would never have spoken to him. I would have been his enemy from the moment he entered the house. I would have killed him—if I could.”

“But that would be unreasonable—wicked. You would not feel so now, my child,” I said hurriedly. “You are older—more sensible. You would not act so

foolish a part—if it were possible for you to be so tried—now!”

I was looking in her face earnestly— anxiously. On her answer I felt my fate was hanging.

“I should be worse now,” answered May, with excitement. “I must always be the same to you, dear mother. Nothing could alter that. But if you were to marry again—oh! I am so thankful there is no chance of it—but if you were—”

“What—what, May?”

“I should go away. I couldn’t bear it. I should go to grandmamma.”

“And leave me, darling? Oh, May! I did not think you could be so cruel.”

“Mother, I only said ‘*if*’—and there is no ‘*if*.’ Don’t speak of it again. Why should we discuss an impossibility? And the mere mention of it makes me miserable.”

“It would make you *very, very* miserable ;

you are sure of that, May?" I said interrogatively.

"It would break my heart!" she repeated. "I would not stay to see it. I would go away, and never come back again!"

I turned from her with a white face, for I felt that it was over. *This* was a contingency I dared not even contemplate; and I knew that May's impulsive but determined character (so like her father's) was not likely to change a resolution once entered upon.

So I crept about my usual occupations, and the name of Lord Eustace Annerley was not revived between us. I think my child saw that she had hurt me, though I thank God she never knew how much; but we were both very silent for the remainder of the evening, and only showed our remembrance of the conversation which we had held by an extra share of caresses and endearments.

We sought our bed-chamber together, but when May was asleep I stole downstairs again to the drawing-room, and sat in the moonlight thinking how I should best act with reference to the trial that lay before me. That it was a trial, and a very severe one, I never for a moment attempted to disguise from myself; but at the same time I did not dream of wavering in the duty that lay before me. I *would* be faithful to the trust that Hugh had left me.

I knew that if, when Eustace spoke to me, I refused him on the score of May's dislike, he would never leave us alone until he had successfully combated either her resolve or mine.

The only means by which I could prevent this would be to pretend I did not wish to marry him.

He would call me a jilt and a coquette—untrue, unloving, unstable—a million of hard things, perhaps; but the fact remained

that I could not be his wife, and he must never know the real reason of my rejection. It was very bitter for me to sit and fancy what he would think, when in my heart I knew how ready I was to love him. But May's threat sounded in my ears, and I was resolute.

When I had once made up my mind I could no longer stay by myself. I felt I must fly to my child, and find the comfort I needed for my sacrifice in her arms. She had not wakened at my absence. She was still lying with her fair face turned towards my pillows, and one arm thrown out as though she had been seeking for me. My entrance made her stir, and she commenced to murmur some half-articulate words. Perhaps it was the subject of her dreams that bubbled to her lips.


"*Don't, mother!*" she said imploringly; "*don't go away from me! It would break my heart!*"

I bent over her and took her in my arms, and registered a vow that I would never go away. I had made my resolution, too, and I would keep to it. Living or dying, I belonged to Hugh's child, thenceforward and for ever. No one should ever come between us again. Never more! No! never, never more!

CHAPTER XXIII. \

ATONEMENT.

THE next few days strengthened instead of weakening my resolution. May did not recover her spirits. She appeared unusually grave and silent, and went about her studies and occupations in an aimless,



if any one of them appeared to interest me more than another, and she seemed almost unwilling to leave me alone, lest some one should come in her absence and claim a promise from me that I might be unable afterwards to break.

At least, so I interpreted her jealous watchfulness; although I had good reason afterwards for believing that, though my child may have been startled by the new idea I had put into her head, she did not go so far as to imagine there was anything more than friendship between Lord Eustace Annerley and myself. So much the better. How thankful I have been since to think she never knew the extent of the sacrifice I made for her!

Still—whilst I loved her more (if possible) for her devotion to myself, and felt that the possession of no man on earth was worth even so small a particle of her complete faith and confidence in me—her

manner so pained me that I longed, at last, for Lord Eustace to return and speak to me in such a way as should authorise my telling him that our acquaintanceship must cease. I did not realise the after-pain this step would cause me. May's despondency so grieved me that I thought only of the quickest means by which to cure her. I was like a patient about to undergo some horrible and inevitable operation, who feels that, come what may, the sooner it is over the better. I was like a soldier who, excited by the raging battle, forgets the bullets flying like hail around him in his anxiety to see the enemy turn and fly. There have been cases in which men, in the midst of carnage, have received flesh wounds of which they felt nothing until they sat down afterwards, all the fury and excitement spent, and, essaying to remove their clothing, found, by the faintness that overpowered them, the blood by which they

were stained, that they had not passed through the fire unscathed.

* * * * *

May was at the convent the morning that Lord Eustace returned. How grateful I was, as I heard his voice in the hall below, to remember that she was absent. For I felt sure that within the next hour my fate would be determined.

He entered the room joyously—confidently—as if he already knew himself to be master there.

I received him as best I could. I do not care to remember now how much he had the power to make my pulses quicken and my blood run.

“Did you expect me home before?” he inquired, when the first greeting had passed between us. He had been absent five days.

“Oh, no! why should I?”

“Because you must be aware I should

never have stayed away so long from choice. But one of my friends died just as I arrived in Paris (friends have an awkward habit of dying at inconvenient times, you know), and the relations pressed me to stay to the funeral. I couldn't well refuse, I had eaten so many of the poor old fellow's dinners!"

"You were quite right to stay. It is not much to do for one who has been kind to you."

"But it was a great nuisance! I was annoyed at having to go at all, and would have returned at once if I could. My heart was here all the time! Were you surprised that I did not write to you?"

He had drawn his chair very near mine as he put this question. I tried to answer it indifferently.

"Not at all! I should have been very much surprised if you had. I am not an advocate for indiscriminate correspondence."

"I know you are not, but my letter would have been very discriminate. Indeed I intended writing at first in order to send you a little present I had done myself the pleasure to procure you on my arrival, but afterwards I was advised not to trust it to the post. However, I hope it will prove to you, however late, that with you and me the saying holds good, '*Loin des yeux, près du cœur*'!"

He drew a case from his pocket as he spoke, and, opening it, displayed one of the prettiest and most fanciful sets of ornaments I have ever seen. There, on their bed of velvet, lay necklace, earrings, brooch, and bracelet, formed of clusters of forget-me-nots and leaves wrought in blue enamel and gold. They were so elegant, and, to me, at that time, so novel, that I could not help giving vent to a note of admiration.

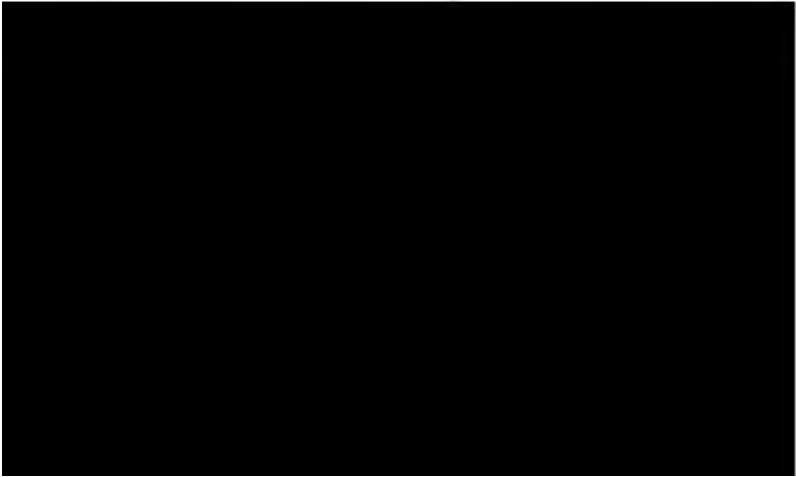
"I am so glad you like them," said

Lord Eustace, as he placed the case in my hand. "I wanted them to say for me, what I am thankful to be able to say now for myself, that during my absence you have never once been out of my thoughts."

But I had remembered my part by that time, and I pushed the offering gently away again.

"You are very good," I murmured, "but I cannot take them."

"You cannot take them!" he echoed in surprise. "Oh you *must*! I got them



"Then try and look upon me as an old uncle," he said, in a way that made me laugh, spite of myself; "don't say that you'll refuse them."

"I never wear colours."

"But surely it is time you did. You are not going to remain in black all your life. A day is coming when you will put on something brighter and lighter, Katie—when you will let me persuade you to doff your mourning robes once and for ever, and to—"

I knew what was coming. I saw the words trembling on his lips. All my anxiety was to prevent their being actually spoken.

"Lord Eustace," I exclaimed hurriedly, "I know what you are going to say. *Pray don't say it!* It is of no use. I shall never change my black dress now, any more than I shall change my state of widowhood."

He stared at me in unmitigated astonish-

ment. I saw the colour recede from his countenance, as though he had experienced some violent shock.

“You are not in earnest?” he said, after a moment’s pause; “you are jesting with me?”

“Indeed I am not. Is it likely I should jest on so serious a subject?”

“But what has happened to make you change your mind? Who has been here during my absence?”

“No one! What authority had you for ever thinking I had a different mind upon the subject?”

“You did not say so, I am aware; but I thought—I hoped—Oh, Katie!” he went on passionately, “think again! Say that I might have some chance of making you reconsider your resolution—that the love—the devotion of my lifetime—”

“Lord Eustace!” I exclaimed, rising in my agitation and moving to the opposite

side of the room, "I entreat of you to say no more! It was to prevent your saying so much that I spoke as I did. I will be candid with you. I understand what you feel, and I have sounded my own heart upon the subject, and come to the conclusion that any dereliction from the condition of life I have decided to maintain would not be for my happiness, or that of any one connected with me."

"But this is delusion—insanity!" he exclaimed. "To take vows of perpetual widowhood at your age! What is your age? One-and-thirty! And you are in the zenith of your womanhood. Do you intend to live all the long, long years before you—twenty—thirty—forty perhaps—unloved—unprotected—and alone?"

"I have my child," I murmured.

"But how long will you keep her? She is to be introduced next season—is she not?—as the greatest heiress in Ireland. How

many months do you suppose will elapse before she is 'wooded and married and a'?"

"Oh, don't speak of it!" I cried, covering up my face with my hands. It seemed very bitter to me, at that moment, to think that I might relinquish my own happiness for next to nothing—a few months of quiet comfort—and then separation, and two homes, and divided interests between my child and me!

"I must speak of it, Katie! I will speak of it! It is unnatural that you should keep faithful longer to a memory, or an imaginary duty. Hugh was a dear good fellow, but he is gone beyond the reach of enjoying your company, and I cannot see how you can profit him by making yourself miserable."

"It is not only that."

"What else is it?"

"There are several reasons. One is—the difference in our religions."

"That is not likely to affect us. I should let you follow your own inclinations in that respect, as in every other."

"But I should not feel the same about it."

"I don't follow you."

"We could not observe the same practices, attend the same church, pray together," I replied, in a low voice.

His handsome lip curled. I knew that he thought very little of the importance of prayer or any other religious duty.

"We can pray for each other—if an amount of praying is conducive to happiness in the married state. Won't that do as well?"

I shook my head mournfully.

"Pray—*pray*—don't say any more! I have thought it all over—I have indeed; and I have quite made up my mind. I shall never be otherwise than I am."

"You will never be my wife, you mean. Put it plainly, if you please!"

"I shall never be the wife of any one—any more."

"You do not care for me, then. You have been trifling with me, Mrs. Power!"

How his heart cried out "No!" but I dared not give it utterance. I had foreseen, from two or three passages that had passed between us, that it must come to this—that I must either tell the truth or let him believe I was a deceiver.

"Yes! I suppose I have been trifling with you—if you call it trifling," I replied.

"*If I call it trifling!*" he said fiercely; "by what name do you call it yourself? Have you forgotten the numberless instances in which, if you have not actually responded to, you have at least permitted me to act in a manner which should have left no doubt of my intentions on your mind? Do you mean to pretend that you are unaware of that which your least intimate acquaintance seems to know—the reason of my prolonged

stay in Brussels? But doubtless you will say you are unaware—that you have forgotten. Women of your calibre are generally gifted with the most convenient of memories and understandings. But I didn't believe it of you, Katie—I didn't believe it of *you!*”

There was so much pathos in the tone in which he uttered the last words that my eyes brimmed over.

“Don't think so badly of me!” I exclaimed. “I do—I have always liked you extremely as a friend; but we should not be happy otherwise, indeed we should not!”

“Who is it that has come between us?” he said shortly.

“No one?”

“I don't believe it!”

“Lord Eustace!”

“It does not sound polite, I dare say, but in some instances truth is preferable to

politeness. I repeat my question, who is the man that has come between us?"

"You are determined to know?"

"I have a right to be told!"

"Then it is Hugh! Hugh only! Believe me or not, as you will, Lord Eustace, this is the truth! I do like you—"

"Not more than 'like'?" he inquired, with an upward glance.

"I do like you," I repeated firmly, "and the evidences of your regard flattered me. But when I came to consider the matter more attentively, with a view to any closer connection than that of friendship between us, I saw plainly that it could not be—that as I am now, so I must remain till it pleases God to call me hence."

"I will make you alter your resolution," he said determinately.

"You never will. And in proof of it, I am going to ask you not to remain in Brussels, or you will compel me to leave it."

"Is the very sight of me obnoxious to you, then?"

"Not so; but it is better we should not meet, at all events for a time. Meeting will only revive unpleasant recollections, and prevent our falling back into our old position as friends."

"So I am banished?"

"I don't like to hear you use that word. If it is inconvenient to you to leave, I will take my child to Paris."

"By no means! I have been the one to blame, it appears, and therefore it is but fair I should be the one to suffer. I shall not trouble you with my presence or my importunities again, Mrs. Power!"

"Oh, don't be angry!" I said, with a huge lump in my throat, as he prepared to quit the room.

He must have heard the tears in my voice, but he did not notice my request. He only bowed as he passed me standing by

the door, and I fancied there was more anger and disappointment pictured in his face than sorrow.

I heard the hall door slam, and it was over.

Even at that moment I knew that Lord Eustace was a man who would never forgive a woman for having wounded his vanity, and that all my tears and entreaties, did I condescend to them, would no more move him now than if he had been a stone.

The first feeling I had was a sense of relief. He had come and gone, had spoken and received his answer; the question would never again be renewed between us.

The operation was over, and the limb was severed; the loss would not be realised till strength returned.

My next thought was to remove all traces of my emotion, and try and look as gay as possible to welcome my child back from the convent. I succeeded so well that she noticed the difference at once.

"Dear mothie! How sweet you look. What have you been doing in my absence? Receiving a proposal, you wicked old woman?"

She wound her arm round my waist, and kissed me fondly. How little she thought that she had hit upon the truth! But I caught her spirit, and my answer was as light as her suggestion.

"Several, my darling! You don't suppose that only *one* would have had so good an effect on me? But I really am feeling very jolly, May, and just ready for some fun. What shall we do, my pet? Go for a nice drive to the Bois, dine at Severin's, and get tickets for the opera in the evening? They've 'Robert le Diable' on the bills now, and I know you want to see that again."

"Oh, charming! What a day we will have!" cried May excitedly. "What a dear mothie you are! It will seem like old


times to be going about tucked under your arm. I always enjoy the play so much more when you and I are *quite alone* together."

My reward seemed to have come already as I watched her pleasure through the succeeding hours of the day. I felt that no new happiness could have made amends to me for the loss of one loving glance from the eyes of my own child.

In the excitement of victory I had even false strength enough to be able to mention Lord Eustace's visit to her, and its probable results.

"By the way, dear," I said, as carelessly as I could, as we sat opposite each other at the restaurant dinner, "Lord Eustace called this morning whilst you were at the convent."

In a moment I saw the shade that seemed to gather like a veil over her bright, speaking countenance.



"He has come back from Paris, then!" she said.

"Yes!" I went on quickly, "and looked in *en passant* to say good-bye. I am sorry you were not there."

"Why—good-bye?"

"Because he is going to leave Brussels, for good and all, I believe. He seems tired of the place, as indeed what man would not be. My wonder is he has stayed here so long. There is positively nothing to do."

"And he is going back to Ireland—for good?" said May wonderingly.

"To Ireland—or somewhere. Any way he's done with this old place. I told him it was the best thing he could possibly do. For a man in his position to live in a town like this is simply a waste of life."

"So you told him the best thing he could do was to go away?" said May, with a little chuckle that betrayed her satisfaction.

"Certainly I did! I hope I didn't take

too much upon myself, Miss May ! But, unless you have been playing a very double game all along, Lord Eustace's departure is not likely to affect you much."

"I should think not," she answered, laughing, "though he is harmless enough, poor man ! And so he's gone for good and all. I wonder he didn't think of making me a present before he went—or you, mothie."

"Well, to tell you the truth, my darling, he did bring a very handsome set of jewelry from Paris, which he wished me to accept—in return for any little attention we may have been able to show him, I suppose—but I declined to take them. I don't care for ornaments, you know, neither do I care for accepting presents from a person who is nothing but a friend."

"What were they like ?" demanded my girl, with feminine curiosity.

"Very pretty—something in blue and gold. But there again, you know I never

wear colours, and never shall until I meet your father in heaven."

"You darling mothie!" said May, as she slipped her hand affectionately into mine.

"I don't think he quite liked my refusing them, May; but I managed to do so without offending his lordship, and we parted very amicably. I dare say we may meet again some day in Dublin. Meanwhile, it is rather a relief to get rid of him—isn't it? 'Toujours perdrix'—you know the old proverb, my dear—is apt to pall."

My child did not answer me in so many words, but she laughed quietly to herself, and a beautiful soft light stole over her features which seemed to say how perfectly content she had become. I saw it, and thanked God.

We had a merry evening at the play together: May's hilarity almost, at times, outrunning bounds, and mine trying to keep pace with it; but though my laugh was


forced, and I knew that a dark Nemesis would overtake me for the tax I was laying on my feelings, I could still listen to my child's mirth and watch her sunny countenance, and say sincerely that I would not have undone it if I could. Then came home and darkness, and silence and reflection.

Oh! it was terribly hard, when the first flush of excitement was over, to remember how much I had put away from me, and the manner in which I had put it away; to remember how much I could have loved him, and how lonely my future might become!

"I have never had any one to lean on all my life!" I cried to myself in the darkness. "Hugh's death made me old before I was young. I have dragged on any way, without one real tie except this little child dependent on me. This is the first time in my life that I have felt what love is, as a woman feels it—and I have been obliged to crush and put it away. Worse than all,

I have been obliged to let him think me other than I am—cold, heartless, fickle—when my heart was bursting with love for him all the while. Oh!” I sobbed to myself, with my face buried in the pillow, lest May should hear the traitorous sound, and wake, “if I might but have laid my head down on his breast and felt I was at rest for ever!” I went on with this kind of thing all through the night. Every woman can imagine it for herself, whether she has passed through the same ordeal or not. There is no limit when the floodgates of our griefs are once laid open. By morning, the excess of my emotion had made me look quite ill, and May reproached herself most needlessly, dear innocent child, for having permitted me to be over-fatigued the day before.

“Selfish beast that I am,” she exclaimed, in her impetuous style, “not to have seen that my dear darling was tired! Mothie,



why didn't you stop me? Why didn't you say that you felt ill?"

"Because I didn't feel ill, dearest! I don't feel ill now. I shall be all right after a cup of coffee."

"Your face is as yellow as a guinea, and your eyes look like dead mackerel," said May, with that charming candour our sex use towards each other. "Shall I send for Dr. Hermann?"

"Certainly not, pet! I will go for a nice walk, as soon as you have taken your departure, and that will be sure to set me up again."

But I did not go for a walk. I was too much afraid Lord Eustace might not yet have left Brussels to run the risk of encountering him. I crept into S. Gudule's instead, and the beautiful solemn service soothed my lacerated feelings and lent me supernatural strength to go on with my self-imposed duty.

CHAPTER XXIV.

I SEE HUGH AGAIN.

BUT as the now monotonous days crept one after another, I became conscious that I had laid upon myself a burden too heavy to be borne. It is a terrible thing to suffer mental pain in secret. If we may but legitimately parade our woes (I am speaking now exclusively of women), may call in our bosom friends to cry with us—to hear all the details of what he said, and how he looked, and to discuss the chance of any dawn arising on our cheerless night, we possess an outlet by which grief exhausts itself and permits its bearer an interval of rest. I do not think that under any circumstances I should have

been able to derive much comfort from this sort of thing, but I know many of my sex who do, and the occasion never arose for me. When my Hugh died I had not a friend to turn to, and I locked my pain up in my own bosom and let it feed upon my heart. Perhaps this first sad experience exercised some influence over my subsequent feelings, but it is true that I had schooled myself to bear such minor trials as fell to my lot in silence, and now that I had received another severe shock, I had but one fear, that the world should guess that I was suffering. So I went about my usual avocations, with the dull pain of disappointment gnawing constantly at my heart and becoming more difficult to bear each day, until I dreaded lest, in spite of all my resolutions, I should betray myself.

“ If I were not so utterly alone,” I used to say despairingly—“ if I had but a father, a mother, a sister—any one to whom I could go and confess my weakness, and weep my

heart out on their bosom, and feel that they sympathised with every sob I drew ! ”

Of course Juliet, who had always behaved like a sister to me, would have heard my story and bestowed due pity on me, and perhaps commended the resolution I had taken for the sake of her brother's child. But I shrank from reposing this confidence in Juliet. I felt as if I could not go and tell Hugh's sister that my heart had been unfaithful to its first love, and that my life was so overclouded by this second disappointment that I had even lost comfort in the hope which had so long sustained me—of meeting my husband again in heaven. I knew that Juliet would kiss me, and stroke my hair, and call me “ poor dear child ! ” but I felt that she would be thinking all the time of the many vows I had made never to let Hugh's memory be supplanted, and how soon I had forgotten him and them.

And if I could not tell Mrs. Delancey, far

less could I have spoken to Lady Power, or either of his other sisters.

“ I would rather trust myself to Hugh’s judgment than to theirs,” I thought. “ My poor Hugh ! my dear bright boy ! If he sees me, I am sure he must pity me—he must understand all I feel—he must know that it is only because he seems so far, far away, so utterly out of reach, that I allowed my thoughts to dwell, even for a moment, on the attractions of another man. Oh, if I could but speak to Hugh ! If God would but let His angels appear to us in person, how lightly all the troubles of this life would press upon our earth-laden shoulders ! ”

As I gave vent to this speech a great longing seemed to rise in me to go to Paris and visit my husband’s grave. I had never seen it since the day they laid him there. I had had a nervous dread of upsetting my hard-earned equanimity, and opening the old wounds by doing so. But now I was suffer-

ing so keenly, what mattered a little extra pain to me? Besides, I had a fancy that the visit would comfort me—that Hugh would hear and understand me better there, and that he would forgive my lapse of faith to him, and lift the burden of guilt that seemed to oppress me, off my shoulders, and I should return home free and happy.

When once this desire had got hold of me, it grew rapidly, until I was feverishly anxious to put it into execution. There was no difficulty in settling the matter with May. It was quite enough to tell her that I had conceived a great wish to visit her father's grave again, to make her readily consent to staying at the convent, under the safe wing of Mère Anastase, until my return to Brussels. Once she proposed to accompany me; but I felt I must go alone; and a couple more days found me landed in the city where my brief married life was passed. I found my way to the hotel where we had lived—I

was even fortunate enough to secure the room where Hugh had died, for my own use.

I entered it hurriedly, fatigued and travel-stained, hardly remembering its characteristics, and little realising the shock the sight of them would give me. Sixteen years and more had elapsed since the day I last placed my foot there, but as the door closed behind me, and I looked round at the position of everything in the room, the past came back so vividly, I could have thought that it had occurred but yesterday. There stood the bed, with its dark-green hangings, which my poor Hugh had ridiculed and called a hearse on the first night we had occupied it together, little thinking his bonny limbs would be laid out stark and cold upon it before the month was over. There was the uncomfortable sofa on which I had slept during his illness—the little table that had stood by his bedside—I fancied that even the white coverlet and pillow-cases looked

the same as they had done at that eventful period.

I stood for a moment transfixed with astonishment, that I should feel so much the same as I had felt, and that time should have had so little power to destroy old memories in me. Then with a cry I sprang at the bed, and buried my weeping face in its pillows.

Ah! this was the *reality* of life! This was the strong, strong chord by which each act of my existence had been regulated—this was the real sorrow that subsequent happiness could only have helped to lessen, but not exterminate.

I was not weak enough, in that first taste of renewed bitterness, to believe that my love for Lord Eustace Annerley had been all a sham, but I proved the strength of my girlish attachment by the power it still held over me, and felt that could *it* have been restored, the other would have melted into nothing beside it.

“Hugh! Hugh!” I cried, as I kissed the pillow which I had already wetted with my tears (it is not at all likely it was the same pillow on which my darling’s head had rested, but nothing would have convinced me of that fact then), “do you hear me from heaven? Do you see your poor Katie, bowed down with worry and trouble for the loss of you? Oh, my boy! I did not mean to be unfaithful to you! I *do* love you—very, very dearly—if you could come back from heaven to me, I should go mad with joy—but it is so lonely without you, Hugh, and little things worry me so, and I have no one to help bear them with me. But it is all over, darling! It will never be again; for the baby’s sake, Hugh—for the sake of the dear baby you left behind you to save my heart from breaking.”

To my surprise, at finding how much the sight of this room affected me, my thoughts had flown back to the actual time of my

bereavement—Lord Eustace Annerley, my tall daughter, May, my thirty years, seemed all to have passed away like a dream, and I was once more alone with my dead darling—living over the first great pang of losing him.

The affairs of this life called me from my trance. The *garçon* was knocking at the bedroom door to receive my orders for the day—the *fille de chambre* was waiting with warm water ; I must rouse myself and lay aside my travelling dress, and decide on what I intended to do. It was a good thing for me that it was so. Still, though I dined at the *table-d'hôte* like the rest of the company, my thoughts were all in the bedroom where Hugh had died, and as soon as I could escape, I went upstairs again and spent the evening there. Strange to say, though I tried hard to picture my husband to myself as I had seen him last (and as he had haunted me for months after his death), with his

handsome features, drawn and sharpened by the cruel fever that destroyed him, looking as if they had been carved in marble, and his dear white hands crossed upon the Blessed Symbol of our redemption that lay upon his breast, I could not do it. In that room where he had drawn his last breath—where he had lain, decked for the grave, in his coffin—where I had seen all these things pass, as it were, in a dream, because of my great misery—I could only bring my darling to my memory, buoyant with youth and happiness, with a smile on his face and a merry jest upon his tongue, and a cigar between his lips. I could only recall the brown velveteen coat, and the slouched wide-awake hat in which he used to look so handsome. I could only hear the ring of his boyish laugh—the impulsive footstep with which he ran to meet me, and feel the clasp of the strong young arms that used sometimes to handle my childish frame

almost too roughly for the preservation of my temper. These memories seemed sadder to me than the others, and I tried to put them away, in vain. My gallant Hugh lived and breathed for me in that silent chamber during the watches of the succeeding night, until I half expected to hear the rush of his impetuous feet coming up the stairs, to see the door burst open, and my young husband stand before me as in days of yore.

“Oh, this will never do!” I said to myself, as I turned restlessly about from side to side; “I shall go mad if I stop in this place. How I wish the morning were come, and I might go to his grave! When I have seen that again, I shall be able to realise for myself that he is really dead.”

I was up with the earliest dawn, and as soon as the world was astir I set off on my pilgrimage to Père la Chaise. I passed through the long line of shops that deal

chapels and graves I passed, set thickly together like sheep in a pen, until I longed that I could take up my darling's coffin and carry it far away to some green, sheltered country churchyard where he might lie in comfort and have space to breathe.

I had great difficulty in finding his grave. At last an old sexton pointed out to me a marble monument which Sir Thomas Power had caused to be erected to his son's memory, and which I had never yet seen, and told me the young Englishman, Monsieur Power, lay under it. I slipped a fee into his hand, and waited till he was out of sight before I could muster up courage to approach the spot. Yes, it was my darling's grave, there was no doubt of that. On a broken marble shaft, with the sculptured ivy, torn from it and lying at its base, were these words :—

“To the loving memory of Hugh George, only son of Sir Thomas Power, of Gentian's

Cross, in the county of Dublin. He died at Paris, fortified by the rites of the Church, on the 15th day of July, 18—, in the 22nd year of his age, leaving a young widow to lament his loss."

And then followed those humble appeals to the mercy of a loving Saviour that are usually to be met with on Catholic tombstones, and which are more touching and appropriate than any number of texts setting forth the virtues of the deceased or the sorrow of the survivors. Though I had been told, in a cursory way, of the erection of this monument, it had never been described to me, and it took me completely by surprise. I liked it so much, though it seemed to bring my father-in-law more vividly before me than my husband. I thought of all the old man's kindness to me, and realised how much more he must have felt for me than he professed to do. That trailing ivy, torn away from the shaft it

clung to! That was me—poor me! torn from my darling's arms so soon! Then the inscription, "To the loving memory." Ah! the memory must have been loving, for an only son—such a son too! They must have suffered, in losing him, almost as much as I did. "Leaving a young widow to lament his loss." What a young widow I had been! only fifteen—and how I had lamented it! And, though sixteen years had passed away, I was a young widow still, and—

The next thought which flashed through my mind brought me to my knees in a moment.

"Hugh dearest!" I exclaimed, as I sank upon his grave and pressed my lips upon the marble column, "I am not faithless—I do lament you still—you only, and for ever! If you were alive," I sobbed—"if you were only alive, you would understand and believe me when I say so!"

I strewed my roses and lilies loosely over the slab which covered his remains, watering them freely with my tears.

“Oh ! if I could but see you again, my darling !” I moaned. “If I could but tear up all this earth and stone that lies between us, and lay my head upon your breast once more as I did on that miserable day when they dragged you away from me to lay you here. Oh ! my Hugh, I *have* loved you—do believe it—and I have loved your child too. I called her May, because you told me to love the May for your sake ; and now that I know why it was so dear to you, I have a twofold reason for loving it. And I belong to the faith, Hugh, you wished so much I should belong to ; and we shall meet again in heaven. Oh, say that you pray for me, and that we shall meet again in heaven !”

I exhausted myself with my emotion. Every few minutes I had to stop and rest my head against the broken shaft.

“ I fancied I loved him, darling ! ” I went on, in a whisper, alluding to Lord Eustace, “ but I dare say it is only fancy, and the feeling will soon die out. And if it doesn’t, I give it up, Hugh—I give it up freely for May’s sake and yours, and my affection shall never wander from you again—never, never more ! But, oh, my boy ! ” I continued, recurring to the old want, “ if I *could* but see you again—my Hugh—my Hugh ! ”

That night I had a lovely vision, sent, I fully believe, direct from heaven to comfort me. Worn out by crying over the memories that Paris had evoked, I reached the hotel again, at an early hour in the afternoon, feeling very humble and subdued, and in no disposition to join the party of strangers at the table-d’hôte. So I ordered some slight refreshment to be served in my own room, and as soon as I conveniently could I went to bed. For a long, long time

I lay awake pondering over the past, and making resolutions for the future, and when I fell asleep I know not. It seemed to me, in my dream, as if I had never fallen asleep at all, for I was lying in the same bed, under precisely similar circumstances, wondering if I was destined to stay awake all night, when I heard a slight noise as if some one were trying to turn the handle of the dressing-room door which opened from the room I lay in. I called out rather fretfully, in French, "No one can enter!" but still the sound continued, as though proceeding from a very weak or uncertain hand, and, by the light of my night lamp, I presently watched the handle turn, and the door pushed gently open. I was about to spring up, in my anger and alarm, when I was stopped by an appearance which took my breath away—the appearance of my dead husband, or, at least, the husband whom (as it seemed to me in my dream) I had, until then, supposed to be dead.

“Hugh!” I exclaimed joyfully, “it isn’t true then!—you *are* alive!”

I thought that he did not answer me, but continued slowly to advance, with his tender eyes fixed upon my face. I had leisure then to observe that he was older, more intellectual-looking, and infinitely handsomer than he had been whilst on earth; that his waving hair and beard had a sheeny light upon them; that his beautiful grey eyes beamed like fire, and that he moved—I cannot tell you how—but without walking. I knew then he was a spirit, yet I felt no fear. On the contrary, I held out my arms towards him.

“Oh, speak to me!” I said. “I know you have come because I called you. Take me in your arms, Hugh, once more, and speak to me!”

Still he continued to advance until he had reached my side, and then I seemed to be drawn towards him, and to melt into his


being till we were one. I saw him no longer, but I felt my head was laid against his breast, and that a gentle warmth was diffusing itself all round my wounded heart in consequence. Then in the darkness, with my eyes hid, I heard his voice :

“Katie ! there is no death. I live thrice over in the Light of God. Be comforted, dear heart ! I am the angel appointed to watch over you. I carry your prayers up to the throne of heaven. Your sacrifice has been accepted there, and the reward will come ! ”

“Oh, Hugh ! ” I sobbed, “I love you—I love you ! ”

His sweet voice fell like music on the silence which succeeded my impetuous speech.

“I know you love me. Love cannot die ! Remember my last words to you : ‘Here or there, always *one* ! ’ One on earth—one in heaven—one for ever and for ever ! Blessed be His holy Name ! ”



"And I forgot it!" I exclaimed. "I would have put another in your place. Oh, Hugh, forgive me!"

I felt his hand pressed firmly, lovingly upon my head.

"There is nothing to forgive. You *could* not put any one in my place. The chamber is locked—I only hold the key. But you have been mercifully saved from more sorrow; and it will fall instead on a head that is very dear to you. Be watchful, be prayerful, be patient, Katie. The need is coming."

"Oh, tell me how! You frighten me!"

"I may not tell you how. But God is above us all, and I watch over you. Be content."

"Are you often with me, Hugh?"

"Very often. When in your morning prayers you invoke your guardian angel to protect you, you invoke me. When at night you kneel to kiss the ground at his

feet, you kneel to me. Do not forget it, Katie."

"I am so glad—so thankful! If I had but known it before, I should never have acted as I have done. But I thought you were so far away, my Hugh! I thought you could neither see nor hear me—and I was so lonely. Oh! why cannot you stay near me, as you are staying now, for ever? Why did God blight all my life by taking you away so soon?"

"Raise up your head and look at me."

In my dream I thought I did as he desired me, and hid my eyes again immediately. The brightness of his countenance was so dazzling, I could not bear to encounter it.

"When I married you, Katie, I was so young that neither my good nor evil passions were properly developed, and the evil greatly predominated. Had I been left longer in this world, I should have ruined not only my own life, but yours. It was

necessary for the salvation of both of us that I should be removed. So the Lord mercifully took me before I had sunk into actual sin; and having purged away the grossness of my mortal nature, He appointed me to the thrice blessed task of guarding your soul from the dangers mine had escaped. And when we meet again, you will acknowledge His exceeding love and justice."

"We *shall* meet again, Hughie? Say we shall meet again!"

"My darling," he replied—and his voice became, for the first time, so sweetly human that it thrilled right through me—"we *shall* meet again! Never doubt it—never forget it. It is as sure as that God reigns in heaven. The fiat has gone forth and it cannot be altered: Hugh and Katharine meet again!"

"Thank God!" I cried. "Oh! thank Him with me, Hugh. Everything is easy now. The sting of my life is gone."

"My life—your life," he answered, "apart, yet so marvellously blended, are a continual thanksgiving to Him. The fact of our existence blesses Him. The certainty of our redemption glorifies Him. 'Here, or there—always one—one!'"

I felt the arms loosening their hold of me. I knew that he was going.

"Hugh darling! kiss me before you go!"

I looked up in his dear face, familiar still, though glorified, and found that I was able to bear it. The intense white, burning light that had surrounded him before had given place to a coronal of mild rays, like placid moonbeams, that made him look, if possible, still more angelic. A tender, happy smile played upon his lips, and his hands were extended over my head in the act of blessing.

"Kiss me—kiss me!" I urged passionately, in my unchastened, earthly desire.

He did not answer, but he pointed upward with one hand, as his figure was borne slowly and majestically away from my side, and melted into the surrounding darkness. It was as though, whilst he smiled at my childish request, he would have said, "Not here, love, but there—there! We shall meet and kiss again."

* * * * *

What became of me, in my dream, after Hugh's departure, I cannot tell. All I know for certainty is, that I started suddenly into life upon the following morning, conscious that I had been unconscious, but quite unable to say for how long or when. The vision I had had was so vividly impressed upon my mind that it appeared just as though it had actually occurred, nor to this moment is any detail less perfect than it was at first. I often ask myself, "Was it a dream?" and my spirit answers, "No." I firmly believe my angel

Hugh was sent by God to comfort me that night. I will not disbelieve it until he denies it to me with his own dear lips in heaven.

CHAPTER XXV.

ON WHOSE HEAD ?

THERE was nothing left then to detain me longer in Paris. I had intended making another pilgrimage to Hugh's grave, but after my dream the idea appeared almost as monstrous to me as it would have done had I cast his warm, breathing body from my arms in order to fall to kissing the wardrobe that contained his cast-off clothes.

No! I realised now that my Hugh had no longer any connection with Père la Chaise—that if he ever visited that spot it would be to guard my mourning heart on its sad journeys thither. But the hope with which I had flown to Paris was accom-

plished, the mission of my pilgrimage fulfilled. God had granted me my heart's desire. I had spoken with Hugh. I knew that he still lived, still loved me, still sympathised with me, and I wanted no other revelation until we should stand once more face to face. The vision that I had seen was so burnt in upon my memory that I felt almost as excited as if my lost husband had been bodily restored to me; and was ready to declare that, for the future, the troubles of this life would be as nothing, since I had been assured that, though unseen, my dear companion walked by my side through them all.

As the train carried me back to Brussels I pondered much upon the details of my dream. There was only one part of it that required explanation to me. Hugh had said, "You have been mercifully saved from more sorrow; and it will fall instead on a head that is very dear to you!"

On whose head could he mean? I understood the first part of the sentence. I had been saved from more suffering by the sacrifice which I had made. That might very likely be true. I had for a long time been living (as far as men were concerned) a lonely and loveless life. It was probable that had I married Lord Eustace Annerley, I should have become too much engrossed in my new affection. I should have required too much attention and love in return from him, and I should have been disappointed if I had not received it. But on whose head could this suffering, which I had been spared, fall, except upon his own—I mean upon that of Lord Eustace? Could Hugh have intended me to understand that I had been spiritually guided to resist my lover's persuasions in order that the disappointment I thus escaped might fall upon him, and, under the Divine blessing, lead him to think more of those duties which he now but too

palpably neglected? It was the only solution I could suggest of Hugh's mysterious warning; and if it were true, as I could not but believe, what a wonderful proof it was of the means by which God works out His own designs! I thought then, and I have often thought since, that when at the Last Day the meaning of all the apparently inexplicable things that occur in this world is made clear to us, we shall find that our bereavements, our wasted lives, our cruel diseases, are but as so many pieces of a puzzle which must be hewn in a certain way before they can fit into one another and make a perfect whole. Still I was not quite satisfied to abide by my own explanation of the sentence that had mystified me, and the next night, when I lay at a town halfway between Paris and Brussels, I watched and waited, and longed and prayed, that Hugh might be permitted to return and make his own meaning clear. I was fever-

ishly anxious to see his face, to hear his voice, to feel the pressure of his arms again. The natural desire to have ocular proof that I had not been deceived by my senses was raging strong within me, but it was not granted. No second vision came to glorify my sight, nor, from that hour to this, have I ever seen Hugh—even in my dreams—again. This fact only confirms my belief that what I saw on that occasion was no hallucination, but the actual presence of my husband. God sent him, when everything seemed lost, to keep me from despair; to assure me I had still a lover, still a husband, who had but “gone before” to wait in heaven for me.

And I have never parted with that conviction since. I reached Brussels in the early evening, tired but content. My darling girl flew down into the vestibule to greet me.

For the first time it struck me how tall



she had grown; what a perfect woman she appeared. During my short absence from her I had been living so much in the Past that it seemed quite like a surprise to me to remember how many years had elapsed since Hugh had left me—Hugh, who had stood by my bedside but the night before last, radiant with youth and happiness.

“What a great big thing you are growing!” I exclaimed, as I took my own child in my arms, and embraced her fondly. The sight of her seemed to bring me right down from heaven to earth again. It—shall I confess my weakness?—recalled so vividly the present trouble, that I felt the peace I had begun secretly to boast of melt away like snow-wreaths in the sun, until the slow, leaden throbbing of my sad heart became once more palpable.

“Well, and what should I be but a big thing, mothie?” cried May joyously. “Have you forgotten that I shall be six-

teen years old next March? or do you want to try to make yourself out still a young thing of twenty-two? Oh, I am so glad to have you home again, mothie darling! The four days have seemed like four weeks to me. And the Verneys came to see me at the convent yesterday. And the men are going to give a bachelors' ball next month. And Julia is going, and Mrs. Verney thinks I am quite old enough to go. May I go, mothie? Will you take me? Say yes, there's a dear sweet old thing."

She was coaxing and kissing me all the way as we walked up the stairs together to our rooms.

The idea was so new to me, I would not take upon myself to answer her without consideration.

And it seemed so incongruous too! Hugh's grave and Hugh's spirit on the one hand, and May and myself at a bachelors' ball on the other. But I tried to make

allowance for my young daughter's natural excitement at the proposal.

"You must give me a little time to reflect and consider, my darling," I replied. "Oh! May, I have been seeing and thinking of such awfully solemn things whilst I have been in Paris, I cannot turn my thoughts to balls just yet."

She was sobered in a moment. I only mention this to prove how perfectly our minds were in accord.

"Dearest mother! how thoughtless of me. I might have guessed it if I hadn't been a fool! How did you find Hugh's grave? Was it nice and tidy? Has the man taken proper care of it? And do you like the monument? Tell me all about it, mother!"

I did not answer her at first. I had walked up to the familiar portrait of my husband, *insouciant* and smiling with his cigar in his hand, which always occupied

a conspicuous position on the walls of our sitting-room. It had always appeared such an excellent portrait to me till then, and indeed to every one who had known him; now, somehow it looked coarse and gaudy, and as if there were no soul in the expression of the boyish face.

"It is not a bit like him," I remarked reflectively.

"Not like him!" echoed May in a tone of disappointment. "Not like Hugh! Why, mothie, I always thought you considered it such an excellent likeness. Such a dear face as it is, too; so jolly and merry! If that's not like Hugh, how am I ever to know what he's like?"

"Oh! he is so much more intellectual and refined-looking," I answered hardly knowing what I said. "So much handsomer—grander—more majestic. How I wish you could have seen him, May!"

"Mothie! have you seen him?" exclaimed my child in a voice of awe.

Her tone recalled me to my senses. I had determined never to tell any one—not even May—of that bright, happy vision. I meant to keep it as a sweet solemn secret between my guardian angel and myself. So I answered somewhat evasively :

“Only in a dream, love! a beautiful, blessed dream! It was natural I should dream of him, for I slept in the very bed he died upon.”

And then I entered into such details as I knew would interest her, concerning my stay in Paris.

“But about the bachelors’ ball, mother,” suggested May, when the evening had somewhat advanced, and she began to think sufficient time had been devoted to her father’s memory. She was a dear, loving, dutiful child, but she could only regret his loss for my sake, not her own, and there are limits to sympathy, however well-placed.

“I shall be sorry to disappoint you, May,

but I think you are much too young to go," I said decisively.


"Mother dear, you want to keep me a baby for ever! I am older by several months than Julia Verney, and twice as much a woman in appearance; Mrs. Verney thought I was eighteen. And it isn't a public ball, you know, only private invitations, and there are so few English girls in Brussels."

"You seem to have conceived a very sudden desire to appear in the world, my May!"

"Well, I suppose it's only natural at my age, mothie. Girls can't be kept at school for ever, you know, and of course I should like to go to parties, and dance, like others do."

I sighed deeply, and commenced to ruminate. There was no doubt about it. My child was shooting up into a woman. I think this must always be a trying period to the parent by whose side his child's life

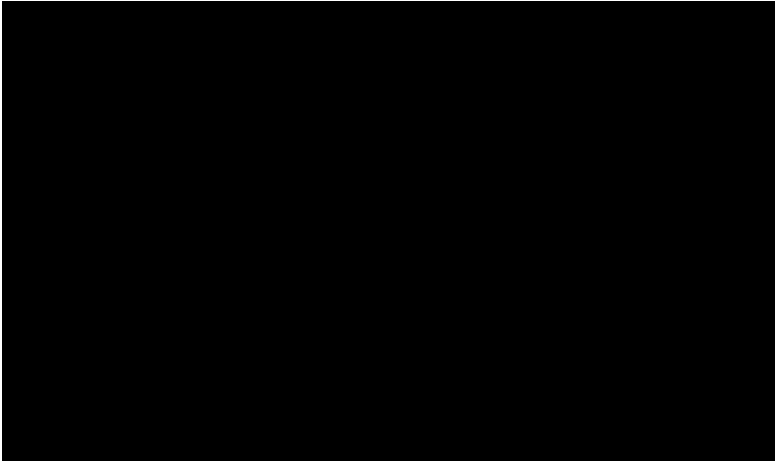
has been wholly spent. To find that the pleasant time when your son or daughter looked up to you as to their universal good is over; that instead of the young spirit that depended trustfully on yours for help in all its difficulties, and comfort in all its sorrows, you have a man or woman with diverse opinions, diverse pursuits, and diverse thoughts; an individual, in fact, who, however much he may still love and venerate you, dares to measure your right of action by his own—is to have all perhaps you wish for—but it is to lose your *child*! One could not desire one's own creation *not* to become individualised—it would be a sorry sort of affection that would keep its object dependent through existence; but there must be a certain wrench when it casts off that dependency; the same sort of unseen effort with which we pass from youth to age, or discover that the pleasures of life have lost their zest for us. And I



felt this perhaps in a stronger degree because May was my only child, and had been my only companion for so long. Yet I was proud of her progress even whilst I sighed over it.

“I can’t wear your dresses even now, mothie!” she went on, presently. “You know the skirts are up to my ankles. I was measured at the convent yesterday, and I am just five foot five. That’s an inch taller than you are.”

“My darling child! I know you are big enough for anything. But about this ball,



dear May, I have never spoken much to you about your prospects in life, because it was not necessary for your happiness, but it is just as well you should know now that you could not, on account of your future position, make your *début* in society without people talking about it."

"Talking about *me*!" said May, with open eyes.

"Yes! about you, and the money you are likely to inherit, and so on. This is a very mercenary world, my child, and the sooner you learn that the better. You might be the most amiable and the most virtuous girl that was ever born, but so long as you were poor the majority of your fellow-creatures would not take the trouble even to inquire whether you were married or single. But the possession, or the probable possession, of money brings a thousand temptations in its train. I am very sorry you are an heiress, May! I much

fear it will never contribute either to your happiness or your respectability !”

“ Oh, mothie ! what a croaking prophecy. Am I such a *very* big heiress, then ? ”

“ You will have more money, a great deal, than you require, May, and others will envy you the possession, and want to share it with you.”

“ I never mean to share it with any one but you, darling.”

I smiled and kissed her. Did she remember those words, I wonder, a twelve-month afterwards.

“ That is like you, my own child, in everything—in the generosity of the speech, and its thoughtlessness. But it would be as foolish for me to entertain such an idea as it would be selfish to permit it. Wealth, like all God’s gifts, is a blessing when properly bestowed ; but a woman is very unlikely to be able to bestow it properly without the help of a man. You will marry

some day, my darling, and marry, I most fervently pray, happily ; but I trust that it may be a long, long time before that comes to pass."

"Of course it will," said my girl; but she did not deny the probability, and I saw her dear cheeks redden at the idea.

"I can't spare you yet awhile, my May!"

"Of course not, mother," she repeated; and then, after a slight pause, she added: "But I should like to know exactly *how much* money I am going to have."

"Why, May?"

Her sudden curiosity startled me; for, as I have said before, I had never mentioned the subject of her fortune to her, except in a cursory way. The expenses of her education had always been liberally disbursed by Lady Power, and for the rest we had had quite as much money as we needed for our moderate way of living. But I had heard

from Juliet that the old lady was sparing no expense to set Gentian's Cross in order against the return of her grandchild to Ireland, which had been fixed to take place the ensuing year.

"I think I ought to be told," said May, in answer to my question. "I suppose the money is mine now, although we don't use it."

"No! it will not be yours until you are twenty-one."

"How much shall I have then, mother?"

"Five thousand a year!"

The words dropped lingeringly, reluctantly, from my lips. I had so much wished to keep this knowledge from her.

"*Five thousand a year!*" repeated May delightedly; "what fun! And how many houses, mothie?"

"How many? Do you think you are to have them by the dozen, darling?"

"No! No! of course not! But isn't Gentian's Cross mine, and the place in Wicklow? Walter Delancey told me so the last time we were in England."

"I believe they will be, May. They will prove a great responsibility to you, I fear. I have often wished they had not been entailed in the female line."

"Oh! don't say that, mothie! because we'll have such a jolly time of it by-and-by. Nothing shall be too good for my old darling when I get my money. She shall have the most lovely dresses, and the most beautiful jewelry, and the finest horses and carriages that were ever seen in the 'ould counthry' yet."

"Whatever should I do with them, May?" said I, laughing.

"Use them, of course, dear, for the sake of your own little maid."

"Poor little maid! with all her troubles before her, and that luckless money to cap them!"

"The poor little maid doesn't think herself poor, I can assure you. And then—if it ever *is* a bother, which I don't believe, why I'll get some nice jolly fellow to look after it for us, mother, and take all the trouble off our hands."

"And take you off my hands, too!"

"That I'm sure he shan't. No one will ever be clever enough to do that! I shall look out for somebody just like Hugh, mother, who'll love you as much as he does me, or more; and then we'll all live happily together!"

"You'll never get another Hugh!" I exclaimed indignantly.

"Well, then, we'll take the next best fellow we can find," replied my darling, as she sat down upon my lap, and kissed me repeatedly.

I sat there returning her embraces, feeling miserable, I hardly knew why, and wondering between whiles, in a kind of

misty, half-stupid manner, on whose head Hugh could have meant me to understand the sorrow I had missed should fall. And as I pondered, I kissed the golden crown of the head of my own child and his, and pressed my face against her hot crimson cheeks, and never once thought of *her*.

END OF VOL. II.



